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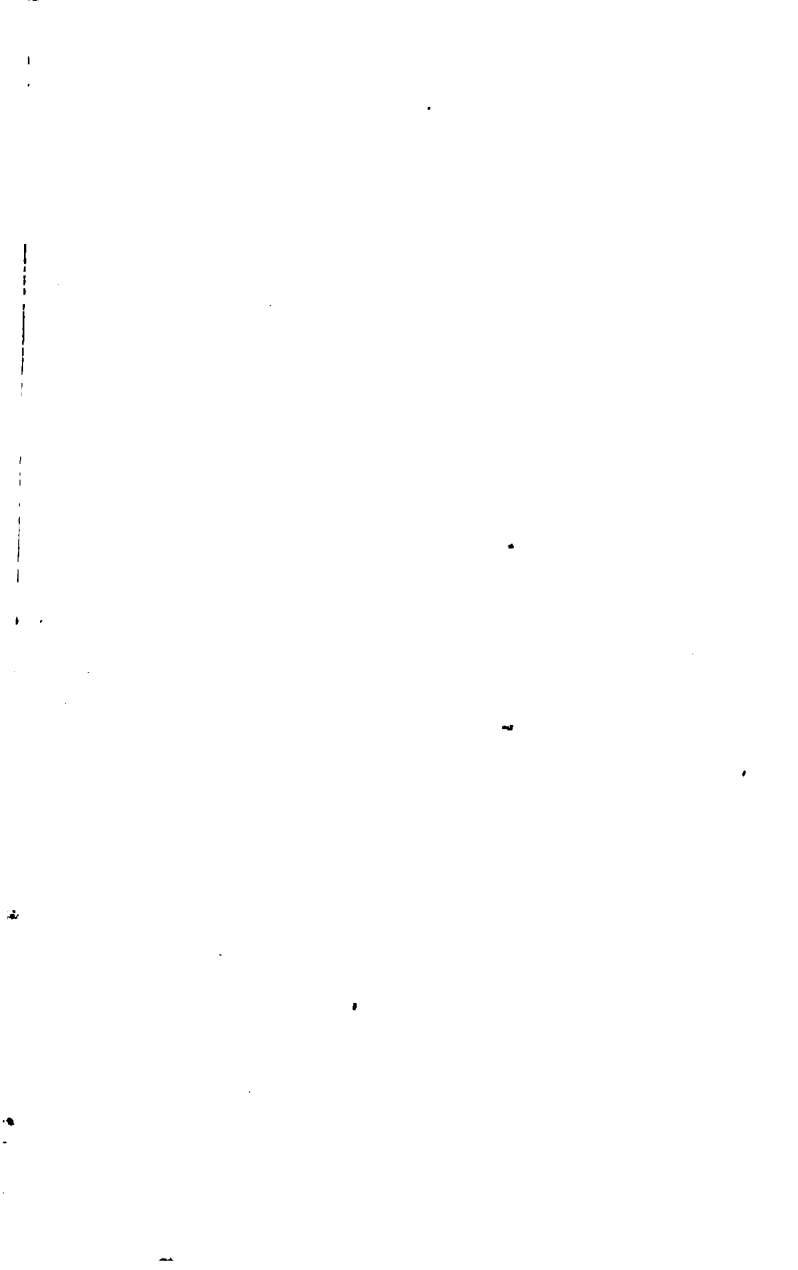


LEGENDARY TALES.



" Not too wise to despise old Legends."

CHARLES LAMB.





KNOW THYSELF.

LEGENDARY TALES.

BY MRS. ALFRED GATTY, *Margaret*
AUTHOR OF "PARABLES FROM (Scott)
NATURE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY PHIZ.



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A LEGEND OF SOLOGNE.



I HAD a curious adventure one Christmas, an adventure which influenced my fate for life, and which I really think worth recording.

It happened a few days before Christmas-eve. The weather was very gloomy and cold, and on the evening in question I paced up and down the large old library for nearly an hour after my solitary dinner, in a rather dull and quarrelsome state of mind.

It sounds ridiculous to say so, but I was out of humour about an old proverb.

Not that a man always really knows what he is out of humour about, even when he fancies he does.

Sometimes it is simply owing to indigestion ; but sometimes to the awakened gnawings of an ill-satisfied conscience. It behoves the sufferer to look closely into the matter, for the remedies for the two complaints are not the same.

We all of us, I suspect, however, find it easiest, in such cases, to lay hold upon some trumpery little grievance, and make it the scape-goat of our unpleasant condition ; and, perhaps, this may have been my resource on the evening I speak of. We shall see.

There was nothing in the room I was in—its condition or contents—to account for any uncomfortable sensations. A cheerful fire was blazing in the grate : my favourite dog and cat were lying before it, rejoicing in the warmth it sent out ; and as for the library itself, there was not such a collection of books in all the country round, as I very well knew.

They had been brought together from all quarters of the world by my father, who had been a great traveller in his youth ; and there were volumes in almost every language under the sun.

Iceland and China, Russia and Armenia, had each their representatives on my shelves. Old-Troubadour poetry sat side by side with the Eddas of Scandinavian mythology; the folio Celtic dictionary stood up boldly by that of Persia; and the Italian Classics shone out among them all, with a delicate, ghost-like appearance, in their livery of vellum and gold.

Truly it was a library to be proud of, and old associations had turned my pride into love. But the books did me no good that night; so many of them (all the grammars and dictionaries at any rate) contained old proverbs, and I was sick of proverbs, and could scarcely have listened to a maxim by Confucius with patience.

Nor was this to be wondered at, for it is seldom an agreeable thing to have to alter one's opinion; and I, who had been a profound admirer of those supposed concentrations of wisdom all my life, naturally felt mortified at having had a peep at the other side of the question.

And yet every question has its two sides. A proverb is an excellent thing in its way.

Full of wisdom,—but the wisdom is limited. Full of observation,—but the observation is often one-sided. Nothing, therefore, is more liable to be misused; and a genuine proverb-monger—he who chills off your enthusiasm by a tame truism, and stops rational conversation by a platitude—is a pest to civilized society.

But then, again, look at the Russian peasant, (ah! the old Russ Grammar had taught me how prolific the country was in proverbs;) what an interesting fact it is, if, as modern accounts testify, he can philosophize away his griefs by an axiom, and guide his conduct in life by some witty generalization, rather than by the impulses of selfishness or petulance. The ill-used serf, who consoles himself for his wrongs by reflecting, *Who knows how often the carpet was beaten?* is a man to whom words have become living things, and the practical character of whose faith we should not do amiss to imitate.

Proverbs, then, are valuable or ridiculous, according to their use. But, besides this, they vary in the depth of their wisdom; and woe

betide the blunderer who takes the result of some superficial observation for a solemn and universal truth.

On the morning of the day of my adventure I had been to a neighbouring town on business; and, after it was over, decided to ride forward a few miles further, and visit a married brother, who rejoiced in the possession of several children.

To make myself particularly acceptable, I went to a toy-shop, and purchased, for my eldest and still favourite little niece Clara, a magnetic swan, pleasing myself, as I trotted along the frosty road, by thinking of the large astonished eyes I should see, and the scream of joyous amazement I should hear, on exhibiting my treasure.

"None but fools wonder,"—so runs the old proverb,—mused I to myself as I rode along. But oh, happy childhood! around which the gift of wondering still lingers, without the disgrace of its folly; without the shame of an ignorance unbefitting thy years!

Yes, reader, I said thus to myself, and,

growing sentimental at the thought, wished myself a child, to be so easily pleased; wished that I, too, could wonder at a magic swan from a toy-shop, and voted the wisdom dearly paid for, which deprives the grown man of the luxury of surprise, and substitutes for the sweet delusions which make earth a paradise, a cold acquaintance with facts.

The early dinner was going on when I arrived; but after it was over I sent for a bowl filled with water, took the child on my knee, (she was about five years old,) floated the glittering swan, and attracted it, first here, then there, by the magical stick. But—alas for my disappointment!—the little maiden's eyes opened no wider than usual, and the only sounds that broke from her ruddy lips were, "How its back shines, Uncle Richard!" (It was made of painted tin.) "Let it come to me!" and, as she spoke, she held out a crumb of biscuit to it, in her dainty fingers.

"It will not come to your fingers, little puss, nor to biscuit," cried I, thinking to rouse the dormant faculties into exertion.



TOO YOUNG TO WONDER.

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"Oh then," was her ready answer, "it likes the stick best! come along, swan!" and she took the stick from my hand, and drew the swan about from side to side, laughing merrily at the fun;—and that was all!

Clearly my little castle had tumbled to the ground, with its out-houses of reflections into the bargain, and the proverb was buried in the ruins!

With her faculties but just opening on the world, in almost total ignorance of the laws of nature and the fitness of things, how could wonder be expected from that child? A miracle would not have surprised her. Why should it? How could it?

It is an affair of years to teach the ranging spirit of the human creature the boundaries and barriers of possible and impossible, even in this narrow sphere of its earthly abode.

Possible and impossible! Mere conventional phrases, referring always to the previously ascertained facts of limited senses, and an established course of events.

"You are coming on Christmas-eve, little

Clara, remember," said I, as I kissed her and got up to depart. "Bring the swan if you like, and mind you don't forget."

"Oh, I *can't* forget, Uncle Richard," cried she, hugging me round the neck; "I think of it all day long. I like to come so much; but I wish you didn't live alone!"

I hurried away; said I did not like to be out late, the evenings were so cold; and cantered hastily back to my solitary home.

But my lesson was not over.

On my return I busied myself (it may have been to drive away thought) in rearranging some portfolios of prints, and got my old servant James to bring a duster and assist me.

Now James was a Yorkshireman,—and Yorkshiremen always seem firm adherers to the old proverb, that "None but fools wonder;" for there is no surprising them, even in their most unguarded moments, into an expression of astonishment and admiration.

James was carefully laying one print on the top of another, when I observed him linger for

a second or two over one, which represented the leaning tower of Pisa.

It was a magnificent engraving. I had brought it from Italy myself. I glanced at James's fixed eye, and an amused idea came over me, that at last I should catch a Yorkshireman wondering.

The man's father had been a mason.

"Of course," thought I, "he really is surprised at the extraordinary construction of that tower."

"James!" said I.

"Sir!" was his answer, looking up.

"I'm glad to see you noticing that print. Did you ever see anything so remarkable as that tower? It is one of the most celebrated buildings in the world."

James's eye returned to the engraving for a moment, and then he commenced adjusting the four corners of the sheet with praiseworthy nicety, but his only reply to my remarks was,

"It may be *cilibrated*, but its *creeuk'd* however!"

Well, well! Where a knowledge of the laws of gravitation was necessary to wonder, was it reasonable to expect wonder from James? To his unmathematical mind there were no limits to the possible slope of a building. The leaning tower of Pisa was to him crookedness, and nothing more.

"It is certainly as I thought," groaned I to myself. "The old proverb is rotten at the core. It is only the wise who wonder, for it is only the wise who know where the earthly possible ends."

We finished the arrangement of the portfolio in silence; and then followed the dressing hour, and then the brief solitary meal, and then the lonely winter evening, which, on this occasion, neither my books nor my living favourites seemed capable of enlivening. At last I began to discover that the longer I walked up and down, and thought, the more irritated I became; so I resolved to think no more, and going up to a shelf whereon reposed a somewhat desultory set of books which I rarely looked at, I took out the first volume that

came to hand, retreated to my arm-chair by the fire, placed a lamp on the small table at my side, patted the dog, stroked the cat, leant back in my chair, and opened my book. "Come weal, come woe," exclaimed I, "this is my amusement for the night; and there never was a book written yet out of which *something* might not be gleaned."

(Which is true, good reader—even if the lesson be merely this, that thou shouldst never thyself be tempted to write such another!)

Well, but the book in my hand was an old "Time's Telescope" for the year 1828, and, as I turned over the pages, one little interest after another took possession of my mind. Here was a curious bit of folk lore—there was a peep into natural history. In one place the coming of the cuckoo was recorded; and thence my heart wandered off into the thoughts of Spring, when all inanimate creation seems struggling after language and utterance; and thence back again to the melancholy Autumn, enlivened, nevertheless, by one cheering sound—the note of the friendly robin; a music all

the more touching that it comes when other voices of hope have died away.

But I had resolved against dreamy meditations; so I turned to my book again, and read on, till the tales of Christmas Customs completely roused my attention; and then, all at once,—

“ Well, here is something completely new !” exclaimed I to myself.

For there I found recorded that there was a district in France, named Sologne, in which, for the space of twelve hours in every year, all domestic animals, to wit, dogs, cats, horses, cows, pigs, &c. became possessed of the faculty of speech :—the precise anniversary of the singular gift commencing at midnight of Christmas-eve, and terminating at mid-day of Christmas-day itself.

“ Something completely new !” I repeated, as I laid the book on my knee, with my thumb in the place.

On which the other side of my brain (I am a believer in the Dualistic theory, of course; for

how else can a man ever talk to himself?) observed, "There is nothing new under the sun." On which I got very angry, and uttered the ejaculation, "Humbug!" But King Solomon has said it; and so, good reader, let us consider the matter coolly over.

What, if the solid materials of the earth be but the same as they were at its creation, and therefore fresh combinations and applications of them cannot be called new in an absolute sense, are they not new, to all intents and purposes, when they have not been known, or, at all events, not been made available before? Nay, further, there are quantities of even long existent facts and things still unknown to quantities of people; and is not everything a new thing to him who hears it for the first time? Objectively, if not subjectively, new. New, that is, to him who hears it, even if not new in itself. Do not let us calumniate King Solomon, nor misapply his sayings.

That argumentative side of my brain was decidedly wrong; do you not think so?

Assuredly, to me who had never heard of the Sologne Legend before, it was, to all intents and purposes, new.

For you, good readers, I dare not affirm whether it will be new or not. To some, of course, it may not, but to others I think it must; which I am all the more inclined to believe, because the "Time's Telescope" has been long ago laid aside to make way for better and more modern instruments; and its ingenious editor has long been the victim of that death which he wrote a quarto volume to prove was by no means an incurable disease.*

With all his ingenuity, however, Mr. Whiter made but a foolish remark respecting the conversation of the animals in the French district of Sologne; for, said he, "we are not told in what language they converse."

As if there could be any doubt about it! As if an animal only permitted to talk in one day out of 365 would not be certain to use that particular form of speech which he had listened to during the other 364!

* "The Disease of Death." By the Rev. Walter Whiter.

Besides which, these conversational powers of theirs are permitted as a sort of moral lesson for the benefit of their masters and mistresses; for at those times the creatures discuss aloud the treatment they have received from those with whom they live, and praise or condemn them accordingly.

Happy for those masters and mistresses in the district of Sologne who, in the course of the year, have borne in mind that a good man is merciful to his beast, and have acted accordingly!

While I was reading that passage in the old "Time's Telescope" I was lying back in my easy chair, with the cat on my knee, for the old sandy rogue had jumped up a very few minutes after I seated myself, and the dog—a fine white and brown German poodle—was at my feet, with his nose reclining on my shoe.

And here it is as well to confess, once for all, that I had been rather a peculiar man all my life. That is to say, I was an eldest son, but did not very much care about it; had fretted, to almost a morbid extent, about my

father's death ; had, perhaps, got unsettled with travelling abroad for several years : certainly had never married, as had been expected of me, and never, for the life of me, could make out what the usual run of young ladies were made of, any more than in the old nursery days, when I was taught that they were compounded of—

“ Sugar and spice, and all that's nice,
And that's what little girls are made of, made of.”

Do what I would, they were always inseparably connected in my mind with that foolish rhyme, even after both they and I were grown up.

“ Sugar and spice, and all that's nice,” they still seemed ; but somehow the sugar and spice were never to my taste.

My life was a lonely one therefore ; and those frequent travelling absences, which year by year I was tempted into, disturbed the natural attachment I ought to have had to home. Inheriting decided literary tastes, I found in the variety of interests brought before me abroad, not only a more agreeable excite-

ment, but, as I thought, a more improving occupation of the mind, than the tame routine of country life could afford. I talked of "vegetating" when I was asked to settle; and even when the pleasure of restlessness flagged, and I felt myself sighing for I knew not what, I somehow or other failed to attribute my disappointment to its right source.

Not that I neglected the more obvious duties of my position, be it remarked, whether as landlord or Christian. No farms were more flourishing or more liberally managed than those on my estate; no schools were better conducted or better supported than those in my village; no clergyman was more respected or assisted than the excellent man who, for many months of every year, preached to my empty pew; my purse was as open to him, and to my housekeeper, under his superintendence, as to myself;—and when positive duties are fulfilled, thought I, surely I am at liberty in minor points to please myself!

So please myself I did, and wandered half over the world with that fine, intelligent Ger-

man poodle by my side, from whom I never would part—for the heart, oh reader, must have its objects of love; and my passion for what are called “dumb creatures” was the salient point of my character.

There was one season of the year, however, at which I made a point of throwing all peculiarities overboard, and living for and with other people—and that was Christmas-time. I had no sisters, but I had three brothers, several cousins, and many friends; and not one of them all was ever neglected or forgotten when my invitations went out for a family gathering at the old ancestral hall. I did it the first year after my father's death because I thought it right, and afterwards because I liked it; and I got to like it more and more. Indeed, I will whisper to you, good reader, in confidence, that during the summer preceding my tale, I had caught myself, while contemplating Athens from the Hill of Mars—yea! while actually repeating aloud (I was alone except my dog) part of the magnificent address of St. Paul to the men of science and learn-

ing below ; while, I say, actually repeating that—I had caught myself recollecting, involuntarily and with a sudden gush of ecstasy, the festivities I hoped to enjoy in the coming Christmas at home !

How Athens and Mars' Hill could bring such a thing to my mind, I don't know ; but the reference to St. Paul had, perhaps, touched the spring of Scripture recollections, and so of that most blessed of all its memorial seasons.

Having said thus much, you will now understand that while I leant back that evening in my chair, reading about the Legend of Sologne, my house was all alive with Christmas preparations. The invitations had been sent out, and were accepted ; young folks and old folks—all were coming ; brothers and sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins, and all !

And the mincemeat was made, and materials for plum-puddings were prepared, and yule logs and yule candles were bespoken ; and morris-dancers, skilled in the sword dance, were hired to surprise the company in the middle of the ball on Christmas-eve—a happy

device, which occurred to me first, I verily believe, while my eyes were wandering round the friezes of the Parthenon.

And I really, as a lover and studier of dumb animals, could almost have imagined my pets, one and all, had some secret intimation of an approaching time of festivity. The parrots in the hall grew more noisy every day, and piped and shrieked as if they were inviting the company into the house themselves; the very raven in the yard said, "all right," oftener than usual, although it was his favourite phrase; and the dog and cat hung about me closer than ever, as if they feared a rival in my love.

A rival?—What! allow a faithful old friend's nose to be put out of joint for anybody or anything? Never! never! as I had assured them again and again in our pleasant little colloquies together, when there had been rubbish talked about my *settling*, as the family called it. Not but what I had now and then thought about that "settling" myself, especially since the Christmas before this eventful one, when the young folks had insisted on my asking that

charming — ; but that has nothing to do with my present story ; though, of course, to please *them* and to meet *them*, I did ask her at last.

So there I was in my chair that evening, with the cat on my knee, the dog at my feet, a couple of parrots in the hall, the “ Time’s Telescope ” in my hand, and the Legend of Sologne in my head. Modern French maps do not generally acknowledge the district ; but it lies between the Loire and the Cher, and once formed a portion of the Comté de Blois, as old descriptions prove.

“ What a country ! What a place for you and me to live in together, my old dog ! ” cried I, raising myself gently up, so as not to disturb puss any more than could be helped.

Mop wagged his tail approvingly, as well he might ; for never master in Sologne was more considerate for his beasts than I had been. “ Ah, Mop, Mop ! ” pursued I ; “ if we could but understand each other, and the Legend of Sologne were but a reality, what a life of friendship we might begin ! ”

There I paused ; for there was something

painful in the thought. But soon I spoke again, and asked him, poor brute, what he would say of *me* on Christmas-eve, were we to go and spend it in Sologne!

Mop's tail continued to wag; and then I stroked the sandy cat, and coaxingly made the same inquiry of her.

But puss behaved as pussies are apt to do every now and then, when you least expect it;—she laid hold of my hand between her teeth, and wagged a very ominous tail.

“You can't mean that, puss!” expostulated I; but puss uttered a low growl, and bit more decidedly; on which I slapped her head, and, dismissing her from my knee, cried out, “A fig for the district of Sologne!”

It was in vain that I said so, however; for the more I thought of the legend, the more I wished it was true, and wished to be in that favoured region at twelve o'clock on the night of the Christmas-eve so near at hand, listening to the dogs and cats conversing pleasantly together of their betters.

There is not a viler habit in the world than

day-dreaming, good reader. I recommend you never to give way to it. That I have given way to it myself is precisely the reason why I am qualified to advise you not to do the same.

As an old woman once said, who had been reproaching her neighbour for a fault she also had committed, "It's because I've done it myself that I know how wrong it is!"

But there was some allowance to be made for me that evening. I was out of sorts, as you know, from some cause or other. I had been thrown back on myself over the swan—over silly little Clara's finding fault with my living alone, which for *her*, at any rate, was so nice, as I thought—with the stupidity of James—and, in short, it seemed to me that I was always being thrown back on myself, and that nobody cared much about me except the poor dumb brutes, who, more affectionate than man, could, at any rate, appreciate kindness.

So I must be excused for indulging in day-dreams of a happier state of things.

"At least for once in my life"—mused I, as I leant back again in my chair—"At least for

once in my life, if that legend could be realized, I should know what it was to hear my praises spoken by voices of unmixed love and gratitude. Love!—gratitude!—ay! and perhaps an admiration, which creatures who vote themselves more rational, have not the discrimination to bestow! At least for once I should taste the pleasure of listening to the outpourings of honest affection, unchecked by the trammels of conventional life. Poor creatures! What would they not say of me?" continued I, becoming quite sentimental at the very idea of the scene.

"Look at our dear master!" one would exclaim to another. "Was ever any one comparable to him for tender kindness, and generous consideration for the feelings of every one around him?"

"Surely not," would be the enthusiastic reply. "What a lot is ours, to live with such a man! How different from that of many of our race, who are exposed to the whims and tempers of a house full of children; and a mistress the victim of preciseness!"

“Ah, there is indeed a point,” would chime in a third. “And it is all the more remarkable, because I had fancied, every now and then, that had it not been for his solicitude for us . . . but no matter what I fancied. Yet what sacrifices a noble heart is capable of making! Can we ever love him enough?”

“Ay, and independently of his treatment of us,” would some one continue, “what a superior creature he is! No one can look in his face and not see it. Intellect is stamped on his brow; decision traced on his mouth. How noble his mien as he traverses his paternal halls in solitary thought! Ah! where can one be found fit to appreciate and share those thoughts? Superior to all others of his age, he is, indeed, as he well may feel, no fit companion for them. Unspoilt by his position—in-capable of degrading himself to the frivolities of a foolish world—surely, if ever perfection

It was really too much. Overpowered by the scene I had conjured up before the mental eye, I started up in my chair—a sudden deter-

mination having come into my head—and, laid my hand on the bell.

Up jumped the dog at the same moment.

“ Shall we go, Mop ? ” cried I, in a state of considerable excitement. “ Table-turning is true ; spirit-rapping is true ; everything strange is true in these times ; and, at any rate, we can go and see.”

Mop did not speak, as I half expected him to do ; but he sat up on his hind legs, looked in my face—as only a dog can look—and whined. I seized his paw and shook it. “ It shall be so ! ” I exclaimed, and violently rang the bell.

The whole household was soon in confusion, and the old housekeeper’s dignity was lost in indignant surprise.

Going to France, indeed ! Why master had taken leave of his senses to think of such a thing. Mr. James might say what he pleased, but she wouldn’t believe it till she heard it from his own lips.

“ Beg pardon, sir ! ”—(in a voice between deference and dictation)—“ James tells me

you're going off to France; but do you know, sir, that the Christmas mincemeat is made?"

"I do, Mrs. Jones."

"And the pudding is everything but boiled, sir."

"I know it, Mrs. Jones."

"And the young gentlemen is all a-coming with their papas and mammas, and the young *ladies* too" (emphasis there).

I bowed acquiescence with closed eyes, reclining in my chair.

"And the blue room has been done up entirely new, with chintz and fresh china, for the pretty young lady that looked so pale last year when she went away."

"You presume, Jones," cried I.

"I don't mean no offence, sir," she whimpered out, wiping her tearful eyes with the corner of her muslin apron. "But," continued she, in a half sob, "if you *be* bent upon going away, sir, so strangely, will you please to tell me what I am to do with the beef, and—and—and (that was evidently the sorest point of all) the sweet things?"

"Throw them," answered I, indignantly, "to the —— I was going to say, *dogs*, Mrs. Jones. But (in a softened tone) on consideration, you can't do that; for I'm going to take them with me."

"Going to take *the dogs* with you!" shouted Mrs. Jones, in a paroxysm of amazement.

"Yes, Jones. Tell James about it, if you please."

"What, *all* of them, sir?" asked she.

"Yes; *all* of them, Jones;" (I had several yard-dogs besides Mop.)

"Anything else, sir?" asked Mrs. Jones, in despair; and I felt, though I did not see, for I resolutely kept my eyes shut, that she was gazing at me with basilisk earnestness and genuine alarm.

"Yes, Jones, the cat," was my answer to her inquiry.

"You'll take the *cat*, sir?" . . .

This was almost a shriek.

"The cat, and the dogs, and the parrots, and the horse,—no, not the horse, for he can't sit in the parlour; but the raven, decidedly. The

whole of them, in fact, Mrs. Jones,—and yourself into the bargain,” added I, satirically, “if you don’t bestir yourself to facilitate my wishes!”

“Oh, it’s my duty to conform, sir, in all things; and I hope I know my duty,” was Mrs. Jones’s impressive remark, as she hurried from the room (banging the door not very gently behind her), and retreated to the servants’ hall, where James had much ado to recover her from a fit of kicking hysteria.

I heard the distant sounds of the hysteric scream even through the closed doors.

“All this arises,” mused I to myself, “from my retaining a London domestic in my service. She allows herself to be surprised: it may be a proof of an intelligent mind, but it certainly is extremely inconvenient. I wish she were more like James; he was neither excited nor astonished at receiving my orders. Merely said, “Yes, sir; very good, sir. At what hour do you propose to start?”

I was a little discomposed, nevertheless, by

Mrs. Jones's view of the subject. I certainly had asked all my younger brothers and sisters, and their children, to come and spend Christmas with me, as usual. It was true, also, that I had ordered in a princely supply of provisions; and, as Mrs. Jones said, I had had the blue room furnished with new chintz and china (the shepherd and shepherdess smiling at each other on the mantel-piece were Dresden ware) expressly for that undoubtedly charming girl, whom (*this* time without solicitation from the young folks, who were so fond of her) I had invited to join our family party. But, on sober reflection, I was not thoroughly satisfied about that young person. I had not forgotten her shaking her head one day during her visit last year, and remarking that cats were treacherous beasts.

Treacherous, indeed!—as if that was a quality confined to cats!

Neither had I forgotten catching her eye, on one of those stormy winter evenings she spent here, when I had been to the town for a new song for her, and came home soaked with

snow. Yes! I caught her eye glancing both at me and the dog.

Yet, what had *she* to do with it, supposing I *did* let my poodle dirty the Turkey carpet on a snowy, winter night? The dog was my friend—my faithful, long-trying, affectionate friend.

Why should *she* look askance at his wet feet, as if an insensible Turkey carpet were the more valuable thing of the two? And of course it was *that* she was thinking of, when I put the song into her hands, and she gave us both that uneasy, distressed glance.

“No, indeed!” continued I, still communing with myself. “I am *not* satisfied about that young person at all. She sings like no one else, it is true; she is kinder to those children than anyone else, I am aware. Clara actually dotes on her; and she pats my poor Mop now and then, when I am by—for civility’s sake, I suppose—and even plays at cork-mouse, now and then, with the treacherous, treacherous cat! Oh, that there were no more treachery in the world than what lies in the vagaries of a cat!

“ But I will not lay myself open to the risk of deception. I will go to Sologne, and exchange the doubtful blandishments of the human race for the straightforward praise and love of those who never speak but in the voice of honest, simple truth.”

And so it came to pass, gentle reader, that before another morning had fairly dawned I was on my road to the district of Sologne, with my dog, my cat, my parrots, my raven, and the faithful, unwondering James; leaving far behind me the miserable Mrs. Jones, drowned in tears and expostulations — yet somewhat consoled by my having conceded the point of the yard-dogs, and left them with her for comfort and protection.

It was my whim to have the animals with me; so, scorning railways, it was in a close carriage with four horses that we dashed along from stage to stage to the coast.

And, oh! what a journey it was! Mop barked in the rumble behind, with James, nearly the whole of the time. The cat kept up a restless and incessant scratching and clawing

against the sides of her hamper at my feet—mewing every now and then for milk; of which (with an amiability I afterwards shuddered to recollect) I had stowed away a bottle-full in one of the pockets of the carriage, thinking thereby to soothe her excitable nerves.

On the seat by my side, in a huge cage, the two parrots maintained for a time an astonished silence; but, after their minds became more accustomed to the unusual motion, they balanced themselves rockingly on their perches, or allowed themselves to swing to and fro in the cradle above, perpetrating occasionally the most piercing and unmeaning shrieks. And, while suffering torments from these combined annoyances, I could hear the raven, in his prison on the box, uttering from time to time (and always at the most unpropitious moments) his monotonous “all right!”

How we made the passage across the channel; how we got through the hands of the douaniers; how we endured the diligence, and how the diligence endured us, I will not offer to relate.

A confused recollection of screaming and swearing, quarrelling and barking, bad French and worse manners, on the top of which for ever rose the raven's ill-judged "all right," is all that remains to me of that period.

Suffice it to say, that about twenty-four hours before Christmas-eve of 18——, I found myself in a romantic village in the district of Sologne, in as decent lodgings as the place afforded.

If a Yorkshireman cannot, by virtue of his birth, be surprised, he is not thereby debarred from grumbling; and I should scarcely exaggerate, were I to record that, amid the various noises by which I was surrounded, James's growling was about the most prominent.

It was like a peal of low thunder—going on all day long—never finding vent in an explosive burst, but keeping up a perpetual worry.

In his opinion the place was wrong, the people were wrong, the manners were wrong, the language was wrong, and the cooking was wrong!

Yet, to watch his gloomy face, glaring about

in the midst of smiles and shrugs, bows and gestures of polite interest, a spectator would have thought that it was James who was wrong.

At last he let fly a word or two at the pretty grisette, which I did not think it consistent with my dignity to permit.

"James," said I, "I must request you not to swear at any of the servants in this house. They mean extremely well, I am sure."

"If they do, sir," muttered James, "it is impossible for me to find it out."

"Ay, ay, James; but your ignorance of the language is no fault of theirs."

"Perhaps not, sir," replied James; "but you'll take warning from the month, sir, if you please!"

"For once in your life, you are excited, James," was my answer. "Take away the coffee-tray, and leave me now. When you are more rational ——."

"**ME** more rational?" interrupted James, in a voice of startling loudness, and staring me full in the face, unabashed by the ungrammatical pronoun.

For a second or two we gazed at each other in silence, and then I felt an odd sensation stealing over my eyes.

“Leave me, James,” murmured I; “take away the coffee-tray, and you can go to bed. I shall not want you any more to-night!”

James obeyed.

I got up and locked the door. I threw myself into a chair. Was *this*, then, the beginning of my felicity in the district of Sologne? Had I come all this distance from home, to quarrel with a faithful servant, and on Christmas-eve, of all days in the year?—Christmas-eve! when even I had been wont to break up vain meditations, and let the heart loose to kindness and enjoyment.

I covered my face with my hands; but I could not shut out the visions that passed before me in grim array, like the ghosts that visited King Richard in his tent.

Before me stole the form of the favourite little niece, the darling Clara of her uncle's heart, with the big tears of disappointment rolling over her pretty cheeks; and others fol-

lowed. Jovial boys, with the clasped hands of amazement; ruddy children ready for fun, but with handkerchiefs at their eyes, wiping away their bitter regret.

Brothers and sisters shaking their heads in pity and surprise; and last, not least in love, that charming girl for whose sake I had invested in a shepherd and shepherdess of Dresden ware. Her face was very pale! paler even than when she left the happy Christmas party at my house the year before.

"This will never do," cried I, getting up and pacing the room. "All right!" shouted the raven in the corner; and the parrots shrieked consent; while an echo of James's "ME more rational?" seemed to resound in my ears.

But I held my senses together as well as I could. "*The* hour—the midnight hour of Christmas-eve—will soon be here," thought I, and then —— "All right!" repeated the raven once more.

Now I had always been, as a farmer's wife once described it, "very fond of hearing the

poor dumb things talk;" but I will confess that, on the present occasion, I heartily wished their dumbness would become real—until the time came when the rational element should be introduced into their conversation, and I might be spared the annoyance of random shrieks and mistakes.

As long as I continued to pace the room, however, the creatures continued excited, and I was fain at last to return to my chair.

I took out my watch and laid it on the table. Five minutes to—four minutes to—three—two—one—twelve o'clock itself! I scarcely breathed. The dog and cat were on the rug; the parrots and raven had been silent since I sat down. The cat roused up first; she uncoiled herself from her sleeping, ball-like position, and, sitting up, began to blink her eyes: as she moved, her tail happening to touch the nose of the poodle, he lifted up his head, opened his eyes, and looked at her.

"A good year to you, Mrs. Puss!" cried he, in the coolest manner possible. I drew a long breath. "It is coming now," cried I to

myself. "My dear, dear animals, I shall be rewarded at last for all my care of you, and all my love of you, and all the sacrifices I have made for you, you grateful, beloved creatures!" These thoughts were the affair of a moment as I listened for puss's reply.

"The same to you, Mr. Mop!" That was all she said.

"You are recovered from the effects of the journey, ma'am, I hope," observed he.

"I wish I could say I was, sir," replied she, with a convulsive twitch of the tip of her tail.

"But I am not. This strange vagary of our master's of leaving a comfortable home has not suited me at all. But some people have no consideration for the feelings of others, so long as their own whims are gratified." (Another twitch of the tail.)

I started up in my chair, and was on the point of exclaiming—

"You treacherous and ungrateful cat!" but, on second thoughts, I sat down again, resolved to hear them out.

"I am sorry you are annoyed by our poor

master's freak of fancy to bring us here," remarked the poodle; "but I don't suppose he meant it ill, poor man!"

(*Poor man!*—This from a favourite dog. It was almost more than I could bear.)

"Perhaps not," was the reply, in a cold, offensive tone; "I set it down to his ignorance."

"Exactly so," cried Mop. "And for my own part I confess I always like a change. As long as there is plenty of bustle and confusion I am contented."

"You were not confined in a hamper on the road, sir, I think," suggested Puss.

"I was not, ma'am. The extra convenience of a private bed was not allowed to me as to you; and you ought to feel it a compliment. As also those saucers of milk which you received from time to time on the road."

"Milk was not much to the purpose, but only an insult to my feelings, when *liberty* was what I wanted," was the cat's indignant reply.

"But this is always the way in which selfish

people deceive themselves. They will not allow you to have what you really want, and then make a favour of giving you something you don't care about."

"Bravo, Puss!" shouted the raven; coming forward from the recess in the window, by several long, well-measured hops, along the carpet.

"A good year to you all," added he, "and pleasant recollections of the past one."

"The same from us," snarled a very nasal voice from the cage in the corner. "We can't come any nearer, but we can talk all the same." And here the parrots each performed a little crack, which sounded like a pop-gun, with their bills, and then rubbed them noisily against the wires of the cage.

"So, so! we're all of us favoured alike?" cried the raven. "Well! its a great privilege! Who speaks next?"

"Yourself, I should think," replied the cat, "as you think it a privilege."

"Which you do *not* then, madam?" inquired the raven.

"Certainly not, sir," was the answer; "our simple, significant signs are a thousand times better. Talking appears to me a very inconvenient and round-about way of making one's feelings known. A miserable makeshift!"

"In what possible instance?" inquired the solemn raven.

"In one very near home, Mr. Raven," answered the cat. "For example, we will suppose that I am angry—a quite possible event."

"Decidedly so, madam," observed Mop, with a polite bow.

"With our master, perhaps, for scratching my ears when I am dosing. Well! I twitch my tail—and he instantly knows what I mean. He knows that I don't like what he is doing. My tail tells him so, without any wasted energy or lost time. If he perseveres in his obnoxious treatment, I growl; if he still perseveres, I bite. Now look at your talker, who has no tail to twitch, and who is unable to growl; see what waste of breath—see what labour of the tongue it costs him to explain the

three degrees of dislike, which my three simple actions expressed at once. Bah! I call your privilege a dull and wearisome makeshift."

"Bravo, Puss!" cried the raven once more.

"But *I* cannot join you in the bravo," snarled the nasal voice from the cage. "To talk is the privilege of the superior few—their privilege and their joy."

"Our master is not one of the superior few, then," tittered the poodle.

"How so?" asked the raven; "he is gifted with the power of speech."

"Ay! But uses it as little as he can help," rejoined Mop. "Look at his solitary life at home; always musing and moping by himself. Silence, silence, silence!—unless when that stupid Mrs. Jones comes in to ask him what he will have for dinner, 'A mutton chop, if you please, Mrs. Jones.' Fancy being able to talk, and saying nothing better than 'a mutton chop, if you please, Mrs. Jones,' in the course of a whole evening! or, perhaps, 'James, bring the candles;' and then silence, silence, silence—as before."

“ Perhaps,” suggested the raven, “ people get tired of talking at last. Perhaps he has talked himself out.”

“ Hem !—I don’t exactly think that,” mused the dog. “ Last Christmas, for instance, when those children and that pretty young lady came, there was no end of talking and jumping about. Oh ! it was a pleasant time ! They played with me all day long.”

“ Society has its advantages, no doubt,” observed the cat. “ My cousin at the rectory has often told me that the young ladies there never fail to give her a saucer of new milk every evening at their own tea-time. I like the idea of those little attentions ; they are graceful and thoughtful.”

“ Ay ! those are the delicate compliments that only occur to a lady’s mind !” exclaimed Mop, almost sentimentally. “ I shall never forget the bones that pretty young lady put by for me after luncheon last Christmas. Dear me ! what *could* induce our poor master to leave home just now, and forego the only enjoyment of the year ?”

"What, indeed!" echoed every voice in the room.

"You forget," sneered the cat, "that it was to give us the privilege of talking!"

There was a bitter irony in her tone.

"I should have preferred the bones and the fun," exclaimed the dog.

"And I the milk," cried the cat.

"And I the noise," shrieked the parrot.

"That empty, silent hall—I hate it!"

"Why does not our master marry?" inquired the raven. "That would put all right, would it not, and make the house more cheerful at once?"

"Bravo, Raven!" shouted all; "a wiser suggestion could not have been made."

"Ah!" cried the flattered bird; "ought I to have lived the greater part of a century for nothing? My dear friends, I have seen all sorts of experiments tried, but I never yet saw an old bachelor who did not become selfish—nay, with one or two rare exceptions, I never saw a man remain a bachelor except from selfish motives."

"You are severe, sir," remarked the puss.

"May not a love of solitude—"

"—A dislike of interference, ma'am," interrupted the bird ;

"—Or a devotion to habits of study ;"

"—To habits of self-indulgence, ma'am," once more interrupted the raven.

"Well, sir, I will not contradict you further," observed the cat. "You have the advantage in age and experience, and should know ; and, I confess, I incline to think with you. In these solitary lives, these studious absorbed habits, this shrinking from communion with others, there is, perhaps, a vast deal more of secret vanity than the people are aware of themselves. And, besides, without being personally devoted to the gambols of children, who are often very tormenting in their merriment, I do feel that, by leading such a life of desolate solitude, our master is depriving us of many pleasures and much happiness that is our absolute due, as he has taken us under his care. They are what we should have anywhere else, are they not?"

"Splendid!" shouted the parrots.

"Painfully true," cried Mop. "When I think of the sports of the jovial young creatures last year, my indignation rises at our master's treatment of us in withholding from us the joys of such natural amusements."

"Tyranny!" shrieked the parrots, in their most nasal twang. "We hate the dismal, silent hall, where there is nothing to scream at worth the pains."

"And I hate the dull stable-yard with no coaches and carriages driving in and out. No horses neighing and stamping, no coachmen's whips cracking. Alas, for the glorious days of the inn he bought me from!"

"Miserable wretches that we are to be brought here to talk!" shouted the poodle, waxing more indignant than any of them. "What have we got to say, but that he gives us food in order to keep us about him for his own comfort and pleasure? Look how useful—nay, how indispensable—we are to him! What evenings would he spend were it not for myself and the cat, who stay with him to

divert his detestable solitude? Is he anticipating thanks for his selfish kindness? What can the old fellow mean? And, above all, what avails our having the privilege of talking unless we can force him to hear and learn the lesson of his own defects?"

"Thinking himself a complete wise-acre all the time, too," pursued the cat. "A poor deluded, useless creature that he is, who keeps everybody about him discontented and gloomy, and votes himself the greatest man in the world,—a paragon of perfection! A helpless being, living in solitary conceit, and destined to die childless and friendless, and be forgotten, as if he had never existed! I only wish he could know our opinion!"

"He *does* know it," shrieked I, in a voice of thunder, springing up from my seat, and catching up a stick in my hand. "He *does* know it, and has heard you, you ignorant, impertinent brutes, on whom he has lavished his kindness, only to meet with this base return!" . . .

But, as I spoke, all sorts of noises began to resound in my ear, and a sort of general con-

fusion rose around me. 'The incensed poodle howled and barked alternately; and the parrots, uttering the most piercing shrieks, burst the door of their cage and flew at my face.

Defending myself as well as I could from them, amidst the uproar of noise which surrounded me, and seemed ever on the increase, I found, to my horror, the raven flapping his wings over my eyes, and blinding my sight; while the cat was struggling with her claws upon my chest, mewing like some unearthly demon from the infernal pit.

I struggled, fought, and kicked; but my arms became suddenly powerless. I could hit neither dog, cat, raven, or parrots—all eluded my blows. The claws seemed at my heart; the parrot's beak came close to my eyeballs;—"Clara!—Mary!"—I attempted to exclaim in the delirium of despair—but was unable to articulate.

And then.

"Did you call, sir?" murmured a trembling voice in my ear, which, in spite of its agitation, seemed very familiar to me.

"What am I about?—where—heavens!—where am I?—Mrs. Jones! good gracious! how is this? *You—here?*"

"You'll excuse me, I hope, Mr. Richard;"—and, to my amazement, it was, indeed, Mrs. Jones who spoke—"I was passing along the hall, sir, and all at once I fancied I heard your voice calling for help. Dear me! it *has* flustered me, Mr Richard. (She always called me Mr. Richard, as she had been used to do in my father's lifetime, when she got agitated.) So I stepped in, fearing you might not be very well—and, indeed, Mr. Richard, I'm afraid you're not."

The good old soul was close by my chair; I rubbed my eyes and looked at her. Then I laid hold of her hand.

"Is it really you, Jones?" murmured I.
"Don't be alarmed."

But she *was* alarmed, and quaked all over.

"Shake hands, Jones, if it is you!" I continued.

She did so, with the accompaniment of a stifled sob.

"Am I really here?" was my next inquiry; half musing, as I held her hand.

"Oh dear, Master Richard!" she now broke out, shaking her head, while tears rolled over her face.

"Is the cat here?" asked I.

An agitated sotto-voce muttered, "The brute!" and then Mrs. Jones, after looking round, made audible answer—

"The cat's all right, sir."

"Where, Mrs. Jones?"

"Under the table, sir."

"What is she doing?"

"Licking her paws, sir," stammered the poor old soul, hardly able to get the words out, for she now seriously thought I was wandering in my mind.

"Jones!" murmured I.

"Master Richard!" was her response.

"Is—is—the raven in the room?"

"Oh, Master Richard! do ye, do ye go to bed, sir. I'm sure you're not well."

"Hush, hush!" cried I, "don't be alarmed; only just tell me—is the raven here?"

"Surely not," cried she. "He never was in here in his life; and I heard him, not twenty minutes since, saying 'all right,' in the yard."

"Then it must have been a dream!" exclaimed I; and breathing a heavy sigh of relief, I released Jones's hand, and leant back again in my chair.

There was a pause.

"Jones!"

"Sir!" (still weeping.)

"Suppose you were to fetch me a little sal-volatile, or something cordial—a stomachic cordial, Jones. I have not been quite well, and have evidently been asleep and dreaming."

Jones brightened up and darted away, and I began to think the affair over. And I soon recollected quite distinctly the events of the evening. My irritable state—the reading about Sologne—and then that fatal day-dreaming, in which I had pleased myself by imagining all the flattering things my domestic animals would say of me, if they could talk.

Oh, reader! If you had but seen the blush

of shame that rose to my cheeks, as I recalled the ridiculous rhodomontade of self-laudation I had indulged in, you would have been cured of day-dreaming for life—at any rate about yourself! The rest was easily explained. I had, of course, fallen asleep in the midst of my folly, and dreamt what followed.

“There can be no doubt about the dualistic theory of the brain,” was my next thought. “Before I fell asleep, one side of my brain was actively prepossessed in my own favour; in *its* estimation I was the wisest and best of men. But after I fell asleep the other side took up the tale; and oh, what a different lesson it has taught me!”

“Or perhaps”—(and here I sighed)—“perhaps the sleeping thoughts were but the voice of conscience, which, when awake, I had not the courage to attend to. And thus it may be that occasionally, to dreaming men, many unwelcome truths may be made known, which they turn from in the more active state of waking volition.

Oh! to think of my having, in that waking

state, voted myself the nearest possible approach to perfection !

Oh ! the profound humiliation of such a mistake !

Mrs. Jones re-entered the room, ere long, with a cup in her hand. Now I knew that her store-closet contained, by my orders, all manner of cordials for old sick folk, and so, without the slightest hesitation, I took the cup from her, and drank off its contents at a draught.

But the next instant I was spitting and sputtering in disgust.

"Why, its Gregory's powder, I do believe, Jones," shouted I.

"Don't be angry, please, Master Richard," cried she ; "don't ye be angry, please. Its all my fault."

"Of course it is !" pursued I ; "what on earth could make you think I wanted such filthy stuff?"

"Oh, never mind the mixture, sir ! pray don't ! it'll put you all right directly. I meant it was all my fault if you've been dreaming."

“How so?” I asked, completely sobered and awakened by my dose.

“Well, Mr. Richard, you’d ordered a mutton chop for dinner, and when I came to look, there wasn’t such a thing in the house; but there was that beautiful little porker we killed last week, and I thought it would be such a nice change, and sent you up a pork chop instead of a mutton one—(you didn’t notice the fried parsley, I suppose, sir?)—but I’m very sorry and beg your pardon, sir; indeed I do!”

If I had had any superstitious megrims left, they must all have vanished at this matter-of-fact explanation.

Ay, ay, ay!—and so who knows but what that pleasant change of a pork chop may not have had something to do with my after-dinner irritability, as well as my dream. But only *something*—come, come! I will not lose the benefit of the lesson I have learnt.

My next proceeding was to clap Mrs. Jones on the back. The fact was she had been my nurse in her young days. Then married—then

lost her husband—and finally settled in the family as confidential housekeeper. I had a right to be free and friendly with Mrs. Jones.

“Never you mind, old lady,” cried I; “we’ll have a happy Christmas yet, in spite of the pork and the dream. But remember, Jones! you must not give either me or Miss Mary pork chops without our leave, that’s all!”

“Eh, dear master Richard! what *has* come to you?” cried she, half smiles and half tears. “Was I likely, sir, to offer Miss Mary pork chops?”

In a moment I felt my mistake, and the tinge on my cheeks betrayed me again. But I carried it off. “Jones,” said I, benignantly, “make yourself easy! I forgive everything; pork chop—dream—Gregory’s powder and all!”

“Ah!” cried Jones, recommencing the lachrymose, “it does so remind me of old times, sir; it quite takes my breath away.”

My first sensation here was to stop the long story I feared was impending.

But what, then—was my new lesson against

selfishness to be thrown away? Assuredly not. The old soul had been seriously alarmed for me; and in the lull after excitement, the old scenes and long-forgotten days of her own youth and my childhood had started up before her.

“Let her have her way, and her simple bit of comfort; listen to her,” said an inward voice; and whether it came from that censorious side of my brain, or from conscience, I obeyed.

“What were you thinking of, Jones?” asked I, kindly.

“Oh! it was when you was a dear little boy, with curls all down your back, Master Richard, and I was your nursery-maid. Your poor mamma had gone out for the day, and she trusted you to me. And we had some nice fresh pork for dinner (it was just about Christmas-time, as it might be now), and I gave you a bit as a treat, and a lot of apple-sauce, and you was so pleased;—you was, indeed, Master Richard. And you had a mincepie, too, and currant wine; and then in the night you was

took so feverish and ill, and Missus asked what you'd had for dinner, and I told her (for I always spoke true), and she wasn't angry, no more than you are now. 'But,' says she, 'never you give my boy pork any more, nurse.' And I never did till to-day; and I do feel it so wrong, for she was such a good dear lady, and so kind to me!"

The poor old woman was glad of an excuse for weeping after her fright on my behalf, and she found it in this tale.

And I, too, was silenced. It is sometimes difficult to a grown-up man to believe that he ever was a child—ever was the tender, glossy-haired darling of a mother's love. To a solitary man it is especially difficult. But this story brought the reality so vividly around me, that I seemed transported back at once into a time when domestic love, with all its cares and self-sacrifices, and tender pleasures and rewards, were gathered around this hearth—where I now sat a lonely man, who prided himself on having nothing to do but to *please himself!* . . .

I cannot say the contrast increased my good opinion of myself.

"Jones," said I, after a short pause, "you have nothing to reproach yourself with; I mean to give up these after-dinner naps, and then it won't signify whether I eat pork or not. One gets into very selfish and lazy ways with living so much alone."

I threw this out as a feeler, to trace, if I could, what her views might be on the subject.

"Well, sir," was the answer; "a gentleman like you has nothing to do, of course, but to please himself; (I winced involuntarily;) but certainly when a-body's not alone, but has got other people to talk to and care about, it brings them a deal more knowledge and pleasure."

Knowledge and pleasure! the two great objects of human effort. What a strange idea of Jones's!

I laughed, and told her to go and send me candles, and tea, and to be sure and put a saucer of new milk on the tray—for the cat.

Jones eyed me suspiciously for a moment; but my calm face satisfied her that it was only "one of master's whims;" and when the imperturbable James arrived with the tray, he made a point of being astonished at nothing—as usual; but with his own hands placed the saucer of milk on the carpet, called "puss, puss, puss," three times, with the gravity of a judge, and when she commenced lapping, with her tail high in air, he left the room, as composedly as if feeding the cat had always formed a part of his official duties. In glancing round the room before I retired to bed on that eventful night, I perceived in one corner of the rug the old volume of "Time's Telescope," which had fallen from my hands in sleep, and lifting it up with a sensation of respect, I replaced it carefully on the shelves.

And there it is yet, though more than one Christmas has come and gone since that I write of; but instead of the old cardboard cover, adorned with the woodcut of icy December leading a goat, which then formed its exterior, a handsome morocco binding encloses in its

crimson protection the Legend of the District of Sologne.

It is surely no unworthy feeling which prompts us to a feeling of tenderness for even the inanimate objects, which so often in life turn the course of a career, or rouse up some feeling in the soul which never sleeps again.

While we are hankering after wonders, and seeking signs from heaven, or we will not be satisfied or taught—lo! some flower opening at our feet, or some song of a bird in the air, or some passage in a book we have taken up out of mere idleness, opens the dull, sealed heart, and we are led out of darkness into light, and arise strengthened, but humbled at the same time. And let not the earthly instrument, insignificant though it may be, be despised which has thus created an epoch in life.

But I am fond of relics, good reader, and would fain justify the taste. To me they seem affecting endeavours of the human creature to hold fast from perishing the fleeting events of life.

With what thankfulness I laid my head on

my home pillow that night I will not attempt to describe.

No! I had *not* been quite the fool my dream had made me; foolish as I had been. No! I had *not* run away from a comfortable home at the blessed Christmas-time, disappointing every one that loved me, and making a laughing-stock of myself into the bargain! No! I had *not* deprived myself of the chance of seeing, once again, that kind and lovely face which had gone about my dingy old home last year, reflecting light and happiness in all directions. . . . No! my dog and cat—happily for me—could *not* talk! . . . I had much to be thankful for, indeed!

The morning of the day preceding Christmas-day dawned at last, and I was up betimes. But though my spirits rose many times to a mirthful elation at the thought of what Sologne *would* have been, and what my home was; though I laughed with good old Jones, and even tried to elicit a smile from James; though I fed the raven in the stable-yard, and listened with an amusement unknown before to

his everlasting "All right!" though I every now and then hugged myself to ecstasy and hope; yet, believe me, oh reader, that day was to me a day of most serious thought also!

I summoned up all my past life and theories in review before me; all my secret opinions of myself; all my avowed opinions of others. I sifted motives, and investigated excuses; and though I do not dare to say how much I found to alter and condemn, I will yet confess to you that the reflections of that day caused me to take a new view, both of the responsibilities and happiness of life.

The last thing that I did before coming in for the evening was the one, perhaps, the most foreign to my habits and nature;—I went resolutely into the village, to stroll about among the cottages, and wish the inhabitants a merry Christmas and a happy new year!

It cost me an effort, for I had not accustomed myself to the thing, and shrunk at all times from personal notice. The good will of the poor I had endeavoured to secure by libe-

rality ; but intercourse with them had not been what I had considered "*in my way.*"

Oh, that miserable little subterfuge for evading a duty ! But I had done with excuses now ; so I made the effort and went, filling my pockets with Christmas-boxes, and endeavouring to screw myself up to be agreeable.

But all screwing efforts were unnecessary, as I found when I got there. What was honestly well meant was well received ; and the only difficulty I had, was not to be displeased or disheartened by the rather rough lessons that were bestowed, even in the midst of the good reception.

Not quite as harshly expressed, perhaps, as those I listened to in my dream, but quite significant enough to undeceive any supposed model of perfection. (Oh, the fool I had been that night !) When I observed to one man that I felt I had been to blame in not coming personally among them oftener than I had done,

"There's a many besides yourself thinks that," was his uncompromising reply.

“Your mother never turned her face from any poor man,” remarked an old woman of eighty, who had once been a servant in the family. “Ay, its a sore thing to lose a friend when a-body’s old and lonely ! But the Lord’s sufficient—the Lord’s sufficient for all !”

Old and young, young and old, who is insensible to the comfort and gratification of intercourse with an acknowledged superior ? Who is not benefited by the chastening influence of having to look up and be humble ? Or, again, who does not like to be listened to, as well as merely remembered in charity ?

I think I never was so disgusted with anything in my life as with the new view, thus opened, of my morbid fastidiousness ; a tendency of mind which, like day-dreaming about oneself, ought decidedly to be discouraged.

“Oh, Uncle Richard ! dear darling Uncle Richard !” was the greeting that welcomed me at the hall door on my return ; and the sweetest little face that ever smiled upon a bachelor uncle sprang up for a kiss, while the childish arms closed round my rough great

coat. "Oh, we're all so happy, we don't know what to do!" was her next remark, after our loving salutations were over.

. . . Oh, the mercy of not being at Sologne! Fancy having balked this warm little heart of its joy! . . .

I pressed forward into the hall, where I was surrounded and welcomed at once. It seemed quite odd, though, that they did not congratulate me on my escape, for I had seen all their faces in my dream.

But on second thoughts I was glad they did not know what an unutterable fool I had been, though only in a dream.

Nor did I feel this less vividly when the mist of crowding faces cleared up, so that I could distinguish the *one* for whose gratification I had purchased the smiling shepherd and shepherdess of Dresden ware.

Well! she had looked pale, it is true, when she went away last year, but not now when Clara pulled her forward to shake hands with me.

. . . Oh, the madness if I *could* have been, and *had* been in Sologne! . . .

My spirits varied wonderfully in the course of the evening in spite of my happiness. I did my best to please everyone, and to be pleased ; but every now and then the grave reflections returned, and I was uneasy—I knew not why.

Nay, at one time, as we sat round the crackling fire after dinner, and I heard everybody talking, laughing, and joking, a fit of the deepest gloom took possession of me. I had brought all these people together, it was true, and they were very happy ; but, oh bitter thought ! they were happy without me. My actual presence was not necessary to the enjoyment of any one of them—scarcely that child excepted. I was not one in any of their links. My frequent and long absences had never fretted them—my eternal absence, even, would not do so for long. The grave might close above me, and no great gap would be occasioned. I was, indeed, a solitary, unloved—ah ! perhaps unloveable—being, who might, as the creatures of my dream had expressed it, “ die in solitary conceit, and be forgotten as if I had never existed.” “ Not in solitary con-

ceit though, now," was my concluding thought ;
" it will be in solitary humility at any rate ! "

Here my reflections were interrupted.

" Dear Uncle Richard," whispered a sweet young voice, " you musn't frown so ! What are you thinking about ? "

" Little puss, don't you see the Ogre in the fire ? " cried I, pointing to the blazing log.

" Uncle Richard, shall I tell you why you were not at home when we came to-day ? "

I couldn't think what she was after.

" No," said I ; " don't you tell me, because I will tell you. I was very busy. "

Clara shook her head. " I don't call that being busy," said she.

" I don't think you know what you are talking about," said I.

I had a nervous apprehension of Clara's childish remarks about myself ; and all the more so, because that sweet cousin Mary of hers was sitting on the other side of her, and could not help hearing what we said.

" Yes, I *do* know what I'm talking about though," persisted she ; " for when the post-

man came for the letters he told Mrs. Jones you were going all over the village, wishing everybody a merry Christmas and a happy new year. And that wasn't being busy, that was being kind. *Busy* is all about books, and papers, and stupid things."

I tried hard to stop the child.

"Nonsense, nonsense, Clara! don't tell any tales about gossiping postmen. Come, let us have a game at cross questions and crooked answers."

Perverse little monkey! the opposition only provoked her to go on. "But I must tell about it first," cried she, "for Mrs. Jones, when she heard it, called out so loud, 'Lor, you don't say so! poor Master!' and Cousin Mary was astonished too, and said"—(here she checked herself suddenly and turned round)—"Why do you pull my frock, Cousin Mary? there's no secret: she said—"

But here a soft hand was laid on her lips. Clara's frolic, however, was beyond control, and she talked behind her closed mouth—"I *will* tell; why shouldn't I?"—till I felt my

own face redden with emotion, and, by one brief glance at Cousin Mary, saw that she also was suffused, and had almost tears in those kind eyes.

"Clara," said I, seriously, "don't be a foolish, rude child. Don't repeat what anybody has said, who does not *wish* it to be repeated. People say many things by accident they may wish forgotten the next moment."

I stopped abruptly; a painful sensation overpowered me.

A brief awkward pause followed, while Clara, silenced and abashed, got up on my knee, and laid her head on my shoulder. I soon found out that she was crying. "Little puss," said I, "no one is vexed or angry. I'm sure *I* am not, and I don't think Cousin Mary *can* be unkind."

I did not dare to look at her though, while I said it.

But the next minute she leant across to the child, and with a half-smile whispered, "There's so little to tell, Clara, dear, I had rather you told it now, and then your Uncle will see what

a fuss we've made about nothing. Tell him, there's a good girl !”

“ It was only,” murmured the subdued little one in my ear, “ that Cousin Mary said you were a dear, good, kind uncle, and she hoped I loved you very much, and so I do.” As she said this she shed another tear or two, and then laughed, and held out her arms to Cousin Mary to be taken back into favour.

“ Good, kind uncle were *my* words, Clara,” observed Cousin Mary, as she stooped over her favourite, with some little embarrassment of manner.

“ *I* like Clara's version best,” said I, in a low but still not absolutely inaudible voice ; and Cousin Mary did not speak again.

This by-play of ours had not attracted any attention, and soon afterwards games and sports were proposed and joyously entered into ; and then the sword-dancers arrived, (true to their appointment,) while the young folks were dancing in the hall, creating a great surprise, and being the acknowledged treat of the evening.

It was a pretty sight, in good truth, to see them so gaily masquerading in the old hall, with their bows and streamers of coloured ribbons flying in all directions; looked down upon by the grim faces of departed ancestors, watched by the smiling ones of young children, and admired by the steady, grown-up spectators as they stood round, observing the wonderful varieties and ingenious manoeuvres of that curious, old-fashioned dance.

I took advantage of the excited attention and noise to slip round the room to Cousin Mary. "One moment!" said I; "do forgive me! I was vexed at Clara's nonsense in talking of my visit to the village. Insincerity is not one of my numerous faults; so I want to confess to you that I have not been accustomed to do this sort of thoughtful thing, and you were perfectly justified in being surprised."

Poor Cousin Mary looked quite puzzled by my confidential communication, and stammered out something about my not having got into the habit, perhaps, of going among the poor.

"I have never got into the habit of thinking

enough of the feelings of others, I am afraid," was my rejoinder.

"That is not what I meant," exclaimed she, warmly.

"But it is what I know," was my answer. "I have learnt some wholesome truths during the last four-and-twenty hours, Cousin Mary—(do forgive me, I had Clara in my head!)—and I know now that I have been leading a very selfish life."

"Not in great things," interrupted she, energetically, as if she had been defending a friend.

"Well, but in small."

She coloured.

"You cannot deny it."

She never attempted to do so; and I added, "I had no idea, till lately, of the danger of living alone. Surrounded by one's own thoughts and habits, without reference to other people, one becomes self-deceived and self-devoted, without knowing it."

Here a hand was laid on my shoulder, and one of my brothers said—

"The morris-dancers have finished, Dick; let us send the children to bed, and begin the grown-up ball."

"By all means." And after glancing round at Mary with a significant—"we are engaged for the first dance," I left her to the care of my brother, and hurried away to make the necessary arrangements.

Ay! we opened the "grown-up" ball that night, Mary and I; and, though not much of a dancer, I floated about in the mysterious mazes in a sort of ecstasy.

But all things come to an end. Not only the dance ended, but another partner came, and claimed Mary's hand, and I was left to myself.

For a few moments I stood in a reverie after she was carried off, and then a voice spoke close at my elbow, "What a pretty girl Mary is, isn't she?"

It was my youngest brother; a capital fellow in his way, but a bit of a gossip. He lived in the same neighbourhood as Mary's family, and knew them well.

"Her mother," he began, in a confidential whisper,—"(a great manager, you know,)—is in a state of immense excitement just now. Young Lord ———, who has lately come of age and settled in our country, has been over-head-and-ears for some time, and some people say that they are engaged. He's off on a tour in Italy at present, or you wouldn't have got them here. I don't know whether the report's true or not, but the old lady's delighted at its being said."

"Really!" was all I could utter; but I did utter it.

"Its a splendid match for her," continued my brother; "for though the girl's well enough, there's nothing about her to have attracted *his* attention."

"Of course not," was my conventional answer. "He, of course, is a ———"

"Handsome, splendid-looking fellow as you ever saw, and in the Guards—lots of money and full of fun. Not much in him, between ourselves—not much sense in the family: but he's young; and if he marries Mary, she'll make him everything he ought to be!"

“ And the young lady herself?—Devoted, I suppose.”

“ Oh, hang ‘devoted,’ and all that kind of thing!” cried my brother, laughing. “ If she likes him well enough to marry him, it will be all-sufficient both for her mother and herself.”

“ Oh, of course!” said I, again. “ But now do you go back to the dancers, my good fellow. They’ll miss you dreadfully, and I have some orders to give about supper.”

In this manner I got rid of him, and luckily had an order or two to give. But after they were given I did not return to the gaily-lit hall and the dancing. No! I went out into the cold, frosty night air, and communed once more with myself.

I knew the young man. This treasure of a lord—I had met him abroad. He was a handsome, good-natured lad; nothing worse and nothing better. “ Oh, miserable fatality!” said I to myself, “ to have been permitted to raise this cup of joy to my lips, only to have it dashed down again—and by such a hand!”

“ Miserable ninny!” exclaimed the other side

of my brain; "if you valued the young lady so much, why have you not looked after her a little better? Haven't you been kicking your heels in a foreign country, staring at Athens and all sorts of useless places, and leaving this young lord to be devoted to your Mary? *Your* Mary, indeed! Have you had the ineffable vanity to suppose that your few days' civility to her last year has left an indelible impression on her heart? You, with your books, and your gloom, and conceit, against my lord's handsome face, and devotion, and fun! Why, there's scarcely a girl in all England who can be expected to hold out against a handsome face, and devotion, and fun! Did you expect a pretty creature like her to sit waiting all this time to know whether you would choose to come out of your grandeur and absurdity, and then be ready to drop into your mouth at the first moment you opened it?"

"It is all right—all right!" exclaimed my humbled self. "I have behaved like a fool, and must abide the consequences. But I will not behave like a brute too; I will be contented

that she shall be happy her own way." There came a choking in my throat at this doughty resolve.

But the other side of my brain said, "Come, that's sensible at last." And dreading further thought on the subject, I went back into the ball-room as hastily as I had deserted it.

There are few things a man cannot do when he has resolutely made up his mind; and although I walked about and talked for the rest of the evening like one in a dream, I believe that I conducted myself with the utmost propriety, and even made myself agreeable. To Mary I was absolutely paternal in my manner. Put myself mentally into the position of her grandfather, giving her away to the handsome young lord in the Guards, and questioned myself as to how I should really feel on the occasion. In the meantime I danced with her half the evening; sat by her side at supper; and at last, in a long *tête-à-tête* we had in a corner, confided to her the whole history of my dream. And why not? There was no need for shyness or reserve now that she was a sort

of engaged person. I half saw the coronet worked in the corner of her handkerchief as it lay on her lap. The flowery M certainly took that form.

So she listened to the story with really considerable interest, and turned pale and red several times during the course of the details. The tears even stood in her eyes when I told her of Mrs. Jones's tale about me as a little boy, and how strange I had felt at the thought of that lonely, dull, gloomy house ever having been the scene of domestic love, and cheerfulness, and young enjoyment.

She said she could not think the old place looked so dull and gloomy. There was no necessity either for its being lonely, and its ancient ancestral look only made it so much the more interesting in the eyes of anybody of any sentiment. Besides, places had but little to do with the happiness of their inhabitants; there could be domestic love and cheerfulness in a hovel for the matter of that.

"A pretty sentiment—very! and true for those that like it," was my answer; and some

bitter spirit prompted me to add, "But domestic love and cheerfulness have double charms, *have they not?* in a lordly house like Lancelot Towers, with a coroneted hall-door."

—"You wretch!" whispered the combative side of my brain, as soon as the words had escaped my lips.

"I have been a brute after all!" was my miserable self-admission.—

Mary had turned deadly white as I spoke, and I thought for a moment she would have fainted; but she rallied with an effort, rose up, left me abruptly, and went to her mother.

The evening came to a close shortly after that, and I went to bed in a tumult of varied feelings.

I attributed her agitation to the fact that her engagement to the young lord was true, and in that case my observations had been a wanton insult.

My brain and I were more than half the night expostulating with each other; but I gave in at last. Everything was against me. I had no one but myself to blame, and I took

refuge finally in humility, and tears, and prayer. Reader! we have all to come back to the condition of little children before we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven; and so I found it on that bitter night of suffering and self-reproach.

Christmas-day rose bright with sunshine, in spite of cold; but it shone on a very wan face at the head of the table, for the master of the house had not slept much. There was another pale face present, besides his, and the old joke went round about the roses brought by sleep before midnight, and the evil effects of late hours, &c. &c.

I, however, could not smile about it. To have insulted that gentle, unoffending girl in my own house! To have hurt her feelings on the most tender of all points, and now to behold her at her tormentor's table, looking so meek, and sad, and uncomplaining, and on Christmas-day too:—it was horrible to think of my heartless selfishness and cruelty!

There was no contest between the two sides of my brain now. Both agreed that I was a

villain, for whom hanging was almost too pleasant an end!

The breakfast went on, as breakfasts will do, in spite of sadness in the hearts of those who sit around it; and before it was over, the postboy arrived, and letters and newspapers crackled on every side, which I was glad of, for I was in no humour for talking. I was longing to seize the earliest opportunity I could find of apologizing—heart and soul—to that lovely Cousin Mary, whose eye I tremblingly avoided as far as I could.

Suddenly I heard my brother make a gurgling sound of surprise. He had a cup of tea at his lips, but had not yet taken his eyes off the newspaper, which his other hand held up.

The noise was something between an “oh” and a gulp, and every one looked up. He burst into a laugh for explanation, and said there was nothing amiss, but that nobody could ever look into the list of “Births, Deaths, and Marriages,” without seeing something to surprise them!

It was a proposition no one presumed to

dispute, and he went on with his tea; Mary, who was near him, drawing the paper to herself, as soon as he laid it down.

"True woman after all," mused I to myself. "Curious about births, deaths, and marriages. I wish *my* mind could be diverted as easily!"

"Oh! but then," murmured my other half, jeeringly, "you, you know, are a model of——"

"Hush, hush! I retract. Miserable creature that I am! what will cure me? She, probably, has friends about whom she is interested; and I—am still a wretch!"

At this juncture I was startled by the voice of Mary herself. It was so unusually lively and energetic, it would have aroused anybody—even those quite indifferent about what she said.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" were the words; "who do you think is married?"

I looked up myself at this violent outburst of interest, and beheld Mary, with her eyes full of a curious expression of triumph and fun, and her cheeks full of colour, glancing earnestly, but mischievously, as I thought, at her mother.

The mother met the glance with one of her own, in which there was a shade of uneasiness mixed with attempted indifference. "How *can* I tell, my dear? I never could guess at marriages in my life. Who can? People do the strangest things when you least expect it."

"Its our friend Lord ———, mamma!" persisted Mary; "married in Italy, to the young and lovely, and only daughter of a noble and accomplished duke. An *affaire de cœur* on both sides. Here is a long account. What an ornament she will be to Lancelot Towers!"

Thus rambled on the bright-eyed Mary, in order, perhaps, to give her mother time to recover the blow. My brother stared at her in astonishment, and as if trying whether he could not detect some lurking disappointment through her apparent amusement.

But there was no possibility of mistaking the case.

For some reason or other she was evidently delighted. Several people wondered why.

As for myself I set my teeth together, com-

pressed my lips, and looked violently at the plates.

When *would* that everlasting breakfast be over? And alas, what a confusion of mind I was in to go to church!

"My brain will burst," thought I, "if I do not speak to her before we go; and then, if disappointed, I will go and seek for resignation where only it can be found."

It was no such easy matter, however, to dodge for a young lady who was going to "get ready" for church! and I missed aim several times; but at last—oh happiness!—I heard her slip down stairs alone, and step along the hall. She patted the dog as she passed him on the mat, and, uttering two or three gentle "Mops," coaxed him to accompany her; and they slipt through the glass doors together, like a couple of truants, out, in that frosty sunshine, on to the terrace that stretched along the garden-side of the house.

I was by her side in two seconds afterwards; approaching, however, as composedly as I could, to conceal the tumult within.

But she started at sight of me—started, and laughed, and looked convicted of having—taken my dog for a walk! “I have got Mop to come out with me,” she began; while Mop stood wagging his tail at her mere mention of his name.

And then I burst out, for time was precious, “Cousin Mary—one word. All England does not contain a greater barbarian than I have been!”

Cousin Mary looked at me with a wondering expression of regret; the triumphant smile passed from her face; only a sorrowful cloud remained.

“Why do you say such strange things?” she asked, stooping down to pat the dog.

“Last night,” cried I, “I behaved so ill, so rudely, so unfeelingly—thinking, as I did, what turns out not to be true, and I have been longing to apologize.”

“There is no need,” said the poor girl, on the point of turning away.

What a fool I was! talking about myself and my misconduct, and not getting an inch further.

But I stopt her as she turned. I laid my hand on her arm, and I think the very touch of her unlocked my heart at once.

It was a strange tale I poured out. Such a mixture of love and repentance ; such a muddle between my own unworthiness of her, and nobody else being able to appreciate her half as well ; such a jumble of modesty and pretension ; protestations of regret for the past, and promises of hope for the future, as was never heard before !

My family had often hinted that I was too much of a scholar to be fluent in conversation ; but, oh, dear me ! let me have a subject that interests me, and try me if I cannot talk !

At all events I talked now, and to some purpose. I talked, till every other subject and confession merged in the one overpowering declaration of my unalterable love ; till Mary's hand lay in mine, and she looked up at me with a face of joyful trust and tenderness, which years cannot efface from my mind ; till Mary's voice uttered the blessed words which told of her love, and the little tale of her hopes

and fears, which were all ended now : for now she knew, and she thanked God for it, that she had a friend to love her for life.

The church bells seemed to get louder and louder, and we feared we were already missed ; but Mop was our excuse ; and with much fuss and ceremony we hurried him into the house, with an order to guard it till our return.

People are so accustomed to idle about for the last few minutes before church, that I do not think any one wondered either at our having walked on the garden-side of the house, at our commotion about Mop, or at our faces. For, indeed, what was to be seen on them but peaceful delight ?

And thus, dear reader, the happy Christmas-morning had that year its double festival for us. We went to church that day affianced for life ; and on every anniversary since we have lived the happy hour over again.

And at last Mary became my wife, and the old ancestral hall never looked gloomy again ; and I had my own links when we all met round the Christmas-hearth.

I made my peace, too, with old proverbs; for, in the first place, I triumphed over James's imperturbability, and caught him wondering at my wedding; nor am I sure that his astonishment at my giving up my liberty is yet over: and, in the second place, I found it written, that "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband," and that "her price is far above rubies."

As regards the former part of my life, Mary never will allow that it was altogether useless and thrown away; for she makes me tell her long stories of foreign lands, till I feel like a retired Baron Munchausen, especially when Clara is with us, who pretends to believe that I invent it all as I go on. Nor do I think the little monkey had, for a long time, any definite idea of what foreign lands might be, in spite of geography lessons and maps.

When she was still but a little girl she asked me one day why I travelled about so much when I was young. We three were sitting over the fire, and I looked first at Mary and then at her, and said—

“ Because, Clara, I had nothing to do in those days but to please myself.”

“ How nice that must have been!” exclaimed Clara. “ Were you not immensely happy Uncle Richard?”

To which I answered firmly, “ No;” and then there was a pause, till she asked again—

“ What have you to do now, Uncle Richard?”

I answered, “ Now I have to please my Wife!”

“ And do you like that better?” inquired the child.

To which I answered, “ Yes.”

And we had all a hearty laugh together.



THE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY.



HERE she picked up the notion—who put it into her head—nobody could ever find out; but, poor old lady, there it was! She quite believed that, if she had the good fortune to live to be a hundred years old, she might dine with the Queen!—might go up to London to the palace, sit at her Majesty's table, and, in virtue of her extraordinary age, be one of her Majesty's guests!

She said somebody had told her so; that everlasting *somebody*, who is always saying something which no one else knows anything about, and who can never be identified with any living individual whatever.

She was the gem of the village, decidedly, was old Widow Cocker. Such a pair of glittering dark-brown eyes could scarcely be matched in all the country round; and, long after her hair had turned grey, her eyebrows were as black as they had been in her earliest youth. What a glance hers must have been in those days, one scarcely dared to think! And it was always whispered that "Lyddy" had once had what they called "a temper of her own."

It very likely was so, but the evil spirit was subdued at last. She had had much struggling and many trials in life; but she had bowed her strong will to the will of God, and in her old age was quiet, subdued, and kind.

Poor old lady! her Christian name was Lydia, but the neighbours called her "Lyddy" to the last; and at ninety-eight she could boast that she was the oldest woman in the parish; and that was just about the time when she became possessed by the curious idea I spoke of; and, as she sat smoking her pipe over the bit of fire at night, before she went to bed, she used to wonder to herself whether it might "please the

Lord" that she should live to be a hundred years old!

Ninety-eight is a great age to live to; and, although Widow Cocker retained the use of her faculties to a remarkable extent, that is to say, she could hear, see, and take cognizance of passing events, as well as many of her much younger neighbours, nevertheless she was subject, from time to time, to a hazy and confused condition of mind, which, had it lasted, must have ended in imbecility and helplessness. But the fits of puzzling and dreaminess used to pass off, like clouds from the sky; and, perhaps after giving her up one day as hopelessly sunk into dotage, you would find her on the next an intelligent and very acute old woman.

She had had what she called "as good as twelve children" in her day, and had "buried seven of them," that proportion being by no means an uncommon one among the poor; and, as for the rest, she would, if you chose to listen, tell you all their names, and what had become of each, with moral reflections upon their fate in life, as edifying as a homily to listen to.

There was that "Jack," for instance, the old man of nearly sixty who now lived with her, "he were a wild lad, were he, in his youth," was her account, one day, to the parson's wife; "his father could do nought wi' him, and he was off if I spoke a word. Bless you, ma'am," cried she, "he were out day and neet, neet and day, after all the idling lads o' the place. And he took up wi' a trolloping lass he met wi' at a fair; and they put up their banns and got wed; and we heard no more of them, till he come back one day years after; and I shouldn't have known him if he hadn't said who he was, he looked like nothing but his grandfather, such an old weary look; when he comes in he says, says he, 'Mother, I'm sorry, and I'd like to see my father, and tell him so.' 'Your father's dead,' says I; for, you see, ma'am," continued the old woman, "he'd been dead two year then, and I was alone. But you should have seen his face when I tell'd him! He went as white as a sheet; and well he might, for it's too late to ask pardon when a body's in their grave. But the Lord had had His hand over him, and

brought him very low, to make him know himself, that was certain; for the lass was dead too, and they'd only reared one child; and, you see ma'am, he had to come back at last, to beg his bread of his poor old mother that he'd been used to jeer at. Ah, the Lord knows His own time! It's twenty-two years come Michaelmas, and we've lived together ever since, me and him."

Such was the story of her son Jack, as she told it herself, and it was a story with a very good moral; for every one in the village knew that Jack was a changed man after he came back and lived with his mother. A quiet worker; thankful for any employment the farmers would give him; a dutiful son, and a kind father; and so, at last, he got such a good character, that he was never out of work, and, even in his old age, was employed in light jobs that brought in something.

Son Jack did nothing but smile and shake his head, if ever he heard his mother say anything about that dining with the Queen; but, as the old lady viewed him still in the light of

a child, his doubts did not disturb her serenity at all. "What should Jack know about it, poor lad?" was her consoling thought; and, as to the granddaughter Betsy—the one reared child of poor Jack's family—she sided with her grandmother altogether, and had a quite satisfactory faith in the future dinner, provided only the condition of her grandmother's living long enough could be secured. And, in furtherance of this desirable end, the good-hearted girl did all she could—nursed her grandmother up, and coaxed her up too; often dispelling a gloomy fit, or cheering a sick one, by the favourite joke that grandmother must take care of herself for the Queen's dinner.

"Do you really think, Lyddy," asked the parson's wife one day, "that you should *like* to dine with the Queen?"

Lyddy thought a bit. "I don't see why I shouldn't, ma'am. Folks can behave themselves onywhere."

Mrs. Tresham assented to the undeniable fact, not a little touched by the simple, self-

possessed idea—so true in its real meaning—that, if a person did but “behave themselves seemly,” they need not fear to encounter any company.

“But its a long way to go, Lyddy.”

“Ay, ma’am!” answered the old woman, “and I wouldn’t like to stop yonder; I would like to die at home.”

Here a more sober fit made Lyddy silent for a time; though she soon returned to the old idea, and continued, “But, you see, there’s my son, and he could come for me and fetch me back.”

Mrs. Tresham opposed her no further; for, indeed, what object was there in attempting to dispel the little illusion of the widow’s extreme old age?

She listened to her son’s Bible chapter every evening as devoutly, and said her prayer as humbly, as if no such thing as dining with the Queen had ever been suggested to her. It interfered with no duty, and in no way injured her mind. It was only a brilliant, mysterious vision, which lightened up her old

heart, now and then, with a sense of cheerful expectation; and, to say the truth, I believe that the thought of the Queen's dinner helped to prolong, as well as soothe, Lyddy Cocker's life.

Her birthday fell on Christmas-day—a fact which always afforded her particular gratification. She used to say, “Whose-ever birthday was *not* kept, hers always was, and always would be.” And on every Christmas-eve, as it came round, Betsy had to walk up to the Vicarage grounds to beg for holly, and other evergreens, for grandmother's cottage-windows—nay, and for the inside of the cottage too—for Mrs. Tresham was very kind, and so were the young ladies; and there was always a green wreath made, in honour of her birthday, for Lyddy to hang up over her mantel-piece; if, indeed, she would not, as the yearly joke suggested, wear it on her own head.

“Now, Lyddy, let me put it on your head *this* year, at least,” cried the youngest miss Tresham, a girl of ten years old, who had walked down the village on the old lady's ninety-ninth birthday to see the decorated cot-

tage. "Next year, you know, you won't be here. You'll be gone up to see the Queen; so wear the wreath this year, do, there's a good Lyddy!"

But "good Lyddy" was not to be persuaded. She caught the twinkle in little Tresham's eye, and entered into the joke; but defended herself resolutely.

"It won't do, miss," said she. "Its all very well for a cap such as your mamma wears, but it won't look well on a thick thing like mine; if it had been net I might have thought about it. Now, Miss Grace, you'll be kind, I know, and hang it up on the nail over the mantel-piece. There, to be sure! what a beautiful thing it is! and the red berries do look handsome, indeed! I wish I could get to church, and see them all over the pillars; but my time for church is over!" And here Widow Cocker sighed rather sadly, folded her hands on her white apron, and sat for a minute or two, absorbed in thought.

The good little Tresham repressed the joke that rose in her mind, as to how poor Lyddy

was to go up to London next year to the Queen, if she could not get to church now; and even offered to come and read the Psalms to her after church, if she liked, and tell her who had been there, and what the sermon had been about; and so they parted.

Grace Tresham was a particular friend of the old Widow's, and was well acquainted with one of her little peculiarities, which partly suggested the proposition of visiting her after church. She was seized, from time to time, by the oddest fits of curiosity as to what the people of the neighbourhood were about, and how their fate in life was developing. Not that she had any of the spirit of scandal and mischief-making about her; but she liked to know the most minute particulars of her friends, and especially of those above herself in condition of life.

And, on this eventful day, Grace had such a piece of news to impart, that it required the utmost resolution not to let it out at once. Lyddy's kind friend and frequent visitor, the curate, Mr. Westwood, was going to be mar-

ried; and that morning the fact was allowed to be known to the children at the Vicarage. But the little girl was not certain whether she might extend the information to Widow Cocker; so she waited to ask leave, promising herself a great treat in communicating it, should permission be granted.

Nor was she disappointed; so, having told her tale, she sat laughing and delighted at the astonishment and remarks which the news elicited from the inquisitive old lady.

"Nay, for sure, I am glad, miss!" cried Lyddy; "for he's a young man I've always respected very much. Such a *noist*, steady, well-behaved young man; not like some of your flighty, foolish folk. Comes in here, now and then, and sits him down wi' me, as pleasant as *owt*. Hasn't a word to say for himself, that he hasn't! Going to be married! Well, I'm glad, indeed—if you're sure its a suitable young lady, miss?" And here Lyddy stretched out her hand to Grace Tresham, and fixed her dark, inquiring eyes on the little girl's face. "Do ye know her, miss?"

“ Oh yes, Lyddy, she’s a very nice young lady I think.”

“ She’s *noist* too, is she, miss? Well, that’s well! And you think she’s suitable for him? You see folks should be suitable, so that they may live tolerable pleasant together when they have got wed! And friends is agreeable, too, I suppose, miss, are they? Dear me, there’s nothing like a good wife, after all; there isn’t, indeed! Folks finds it out at last. He’ll be leaving then, I suppose, presently, miss? Well, I wish him well, I’m sure. He’s a *noist*, harmless young man as I ever see!”

Grace was by this time in a state of uncontrollable amusement; but the old lady looked on her merriment as the most natural thing in the world, and begged her to step in another day, and tell her how matters progressed with the lovers, and when it was to be. “ For,” said she in conclusion, “ he’s a young man I shall always respect for his quiet behaviour.”

“ Burnham-in-the-Fields,” where Widow Cocker resided, was one of those lovely agricultural villages, which look like a rustic paradise

to the traveller as he passes through. The large elms round the churchyard, the ancient church itself, with its bells hung outside, the village green with the sycamore in the middle, the cottages, some of them thatched, and with old-fashioned wooden beams crossing the white-wash, diamond-wise, and all the place having the air of being well looked after, formed a scene thoroughly agreeable to the eye and taste.

How far human nature is influenced, or its heart-sicknesses modified by such surroundings, is another question. They perhaps have less effect than the casual spectator might, in his ardent admiration, be tempted to suppose. To some minds the monotony, even of peace, is irritating and vexatious; and many a youth, born and bred in Burnham-in-the-Fields, was glad to leave it for the rougher, but more energetic and stirring life of the distant towns. Such a one often returned, it is true, to die in the old place (as was the case with Widow Cocker's wild son Jack); but those individuals had passed the ordeal of their lives elsewhere, and, by the time they came back, their spirit was better

attempted to the quiet serenity of the spot, than during the heat and excitement of youth.

Widow Cocker herself was not a native of the village, but came from one of those distant towns where a large manufactory of hosiery was carried on; and where her husband had met with her on one of the loitering expeditions from home in which the youths of Burnham-in-the-Fields now and then indulged; and whence he had the pride of bringing home the brightest eyed and most lively of hard-working girls as his wife.

The energy of her early life, and a better education, accounted for her superiority in intelligence to most of the women in the village; and certainly the fact made her an especial favourite with the Tresham family. It also, in a great measure, explained her curiosity and interest about people and events beyond the limit of her own confined home. Her mind took naturally a wider range than was there afforded, owing to the associations of her youth; and Lydia Cocker had at one time possessed considerable conversational powers.

Mrs. Tresham had always taken pleasure in having, what she called, a long talk with her every now and then ; and, when there were no clouds over her memory and mind, was wont even yet to declare that she learnt something every time she went to see her ; while to the children, of course, Lyddy and her peculiarities were a never-failing source of amusement.

During the summer that succeeded her ninety-ninth birthday the poor old lady had two or three fits of illness, which threatened more than once to bring her to her last resting-place ; but, through the doctor's careful skill, and the good nourishment furnished by Mrs. Tresham, she rallied again ; and another autumn came, a season of such remarkable warmth and beauty as had not been remembered for years. How everything glowed under its influence ! How it lit up the cottage gardens with rich hollyhock bloom, and made the hearts of the thoughtful rejoice at the sight of the abundant harvest spread out upon the fields !

But there was a strange rumour afloat just then ; a rumour which threatened to disturb all

the comfort of the place. It was said that a comet was to appear towards the end of that month (August), which would destroy the world; and there were some among the farmers who even began to demur as to the propriety of getting in their corn. They didn't see of what use it would be, they said, and they might as well save the expense! forgetting that the use of saving money was quite as doubtful as that of laying up food.

Mr. Westwood was seated in his study one morning, very busy over his books and writing, when a tap came at the door, after which it opened gently, and Grace Tresham stood before him. Now I have called it Mr. Westwood's study, because, although he was still a bachelor in lodgings, his "parlour," as the landlady would have considered it, was to all intents and purposes, and especially, a study; the room of a studious and scholarly man. Extensive sets of book-shelves made for use, not ornament, filled up each side of an old-fashioned farmhouse fire-place. A pianoforte stretched along in one direction, and an old oak cabinet adorned

another of the sides, along which also smaller shelves for books were edged in here and there; while the window-seats below the stone-mullioned latticed windows, were half covered with cameras, mathematical instruments, and machinery of various kinds, among which Grace Tresham dared not sit down, though it was her favourite place whenever a corner of it could be found vacant, because the vine looked in at the window, and the scent from Mr. Westwood's flower-beds was, as she said, always so nice!

"Well, little Grace, what do you want?" asked Mr. Westwood, while his face gradually relaxed out of a rather stern look into a smile.

"Oh, Mr. Westwood, old Lyddy is quite frightened about the comet, and wants to know whether you think it will hurt us, or not? So I have come to ask."

Mr. Westwood looked two or three times at Grace from under his eyebrows, then got up, removed the camera and a box or two, and made room for the little girl on her favourite window-seat.

"What do you think about the comet yourself, Grace?"

"I don't know," replied Grace. "Papa's away, you know, and I don't think mamma knows much about comets; and—and—Lyddy Cocker is very much afraid of them, Mr. Westwood."

"And Grace Tresham too—a little!" said Mr. Westwood, making an attempt at a sagacious frown. "Come! we will visit Lyddy together." Mr. Westwood shut up his books, shoved his papers hastily away, and took up his hat; and the two sallied forth together, the little girl quite as ready at accommodating herself to Mr. Westwood's ways as to those of old Lyddy.

"Did you ever count up to a thousand, Grace?" asked Mr. Westwood, as they passed down the garden walk.

"No never, I never got so far," answered Grace. "I got as far as 450 one day, and I was so tired, and out of breath, I could not go on."

"Very well. Then you did not get quite as far as half-a-thousand, Grace."

"No, I know, Mr. Westwood."

“How much bigger than a comet do you suppose the earth is, Grace?”

“I didn’t know it was bigger at all. I thought comets were immense things. *Is* the earth bigger, really?”

“A hundred thousand times at least,” said Mr. Westwood in measured tones, and stopping to eye Grace Tresham as if he would eat her up.

“Oh, Mr. Westwood!” exclaimed she; and then, seeing a lurking smile in his eye, she added:—

“But it isn’t true, is it?”

“Quite true, Grace.”

They walked on a little further, and then she said:—

“But there’s its tail. You forgot its tail!”

“The great astronomer Herschel,” replied Mr. Westwood, “was once looking through a telescope at a comet, and discovered a cluster of stars of the sixteenth magnitude through the heart of it. Now, stars of the sixteenth magnitude are *small* stars, and a very moderate fog would hide them completely from our sight. The thickest part of a comet is therefore very

slight and unsubstantial in texture, compared with even our clouds; and as to its tail, Grace, it is only a gauzy kind of mist, and never shines out in its full splendour until it has passed the sun, and received its rays upon it."

"I don't think Lyddy need be afraid," said Grace.

"Certainly not, Grace. Do you think your brother could knock over a cannon-ball with a pea from his popgun?"

Grace laughed.

"Of course not. Well! The earth is the cannon-ball, and the popgun-pea is the comet,—and now here we are at Lyddy Cocker's door."

Lyddy was all in a fuss. Feverishly timid; pious, although confused; she was at one moment unable to care very much whether the comet was coming or not, and in the next repeating and believing all the foolish forebodings which she had gathered from her neighbours; and in such a mood reasoning was almost useless.

She said, "She didn't see that it mattered much which way a body went, if they were ready. Everything must come to an end at

last ; and of course it would be the world's time some day, for those that lived to see it. She reckoned nothing of the woman that had jumped into the draw-well, however, to be out of the way. For her part, she shouldn't take the trouble to do anything of the sort. She should make her bed, and buy her bit of tea as usual, though she knew she might, very likely, be cut off in the midst of drinking it ;" and so on. After which there followed a pause ; and then she turned to Mr. Westwood, and asked, seriously, what he thought ?

Mr. Westwood adapted his answer to her condition, as well as he could ; and, by great gentleness and patience, contrived at last to gain her attention, while he explained that, without a miracle, it might be considered an impossibility that a comet should destroy the earth ; and that the Almighty had no need to work a miracle, through a comet, to effect an object which could be done in a thousand other ways.

Besides, there was no symptom at present, he suggested, that the fulness of time was yet come. There was a promise that the earth

should one day be "full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas;" and, assuredly, that condition of things had not yet arrived.

He had touched the right chord. This internal evidence, as it were, did more than the most convincing scientific demonstration could have done; and the clouds seemed to pass off the good old creature's mind, as she reflected that "the Lord would assuredly perfect His work, and call in the heathen to His fold." Well, she should drink her tea in peace now, and think no more of the comet. Not but what she knew a body might be taken at tea, or at any other time, whether there was a comet or not! So she would bless the Lord, and try to be found ready.

Nevertheless, she had, during the next two or three weeks, slight returns of the comet fever; but they passed off; for her granddaughter Betsy, who had been hid behind the little-pantry door all the time Mr. Westwood was there, smothering down her tears and fright, and listening with a desperate anxiety

to every word he said, was now of invaluable use in reminding her grandmother of all Mr. Westwood's opinions, and confirming them by her own settled convictions.

But, between the comet and Mr. Westwood's marriage, which took place soon after the day appointed by the comet-seers for the destruction of the world, (and it was even reported that Mr. Westwood had wished to fix the event for that very day itself, in order to reassure the farmers,) the season passed away with rather an unusual share of amusement and excitement; and folks began to think that Widow Cocker would really see her hundredth birthday, in spite of her poorly fits and loss of strength.

As time went on, however, she began to take a great dislike to any little joke from the neighbours about dining with the Queen; and even Betsy discovered that grandmother didn't like it to be talked about.

Grandmother made all her preparations, however, by degrees; that is, she got Betsy to

make them; but it was all done quietly and gravely, and when Jack was out of the way.

There was a chints gown with a white ground, and stripes down it, in a long running pattern of bunches of flowers looped up with ribbons; she had had it ever since she was married; and as it was kept put by for those grand occasions that came so seldom, it had rarely seen the light. This was exactly the thing. There was a best cap too; and Mrs. Tresham made her a present of lace against her next birthday; and that exactly suited for the new border, which Betsy made up and arranged with an admirable taste, and was rewarded by grandmother telling her "she was the handiest lass i' all the place!" And there was a pair of thick-soled shoes, which were just what was wanted, and which had rarely been used, because her time was over for anything but slippers. The only difficulty that remained was the bonnet; and that continued a difficulty long after the rest of the things had been deposited in readiness in the old oak chest under the bed.

And, now and then, she would talk over what was to be done about the bonnet to Betsy, when nobody else was by; but Grace Tresham overheard a word or two about it, when she had knocked at the door one day, and nobody said, "Come in." And, very soon after that, the Doctor called, and told Widow Cocker to send Betsy to his house, as his wife had got a little Christmas-box for the Widow herself; and, when it arrived, it proved to be a bonnet, that would have tempted any old lady to go out and show herself, if she possibly could. Lyddy shed a few tears over it, though neither Betsy nor her father could guess why. But at last she laid her head on the table, and fairly sobbed; after which she looked up, and told them not to mind; but the sight of the nice bonnet put her in mind of the times when she was young and hearty, and as lively as any of them; and could take her walk to the church, and out in the fields afterwards, and see the folks stirring about, and be happy "from morn to neet." "For I was a very happy lass once, Betsy," said she; "very happy, and, may be,

thoughtless, too. But the Lord's brought me round, dear, you see, as He brings everybody round that's willing to be led His way; and now I'm a weak infant in His hand. His blessed will be done! Now put me the bonnet by, Betsy, there's a good girl; and make me and Jack our cup of tea; and when Jack's read me his chapter I'll go to bed, and God bless you all."

It was about October when Lyddy's preparations were thus completed by the arrival of the bonnet; and, after that, she never disturbed herself further on the subject, nor mentioned it again, except once, when she confided to Mrs. Tresham what her expectations were.

She thought there would perhaps be several other old women of about the same age as herself, and that they would dine in some beautiful great place "to *theirsens*," as she worded it, with servants to wait upon them. But her chief idea on the subject, and the one in which she took most delight, was, that before they began dinner, the Queen herself, all covered with jewels and beautiful things, "like what they

speak about in the book of Revelations," would stand at the head of the table, and say grace.

That was in her mind the leading feature of the whole affair; and she used to wonder to herself, she said, as she lay in bed awake in the night, what words the Queen would use, and whether she should be able to understand them. Sometimes she was afraid she mightn't. "Other sometimes" she felt sure she should, "because you know, ma'am," said she, "God speaks to us all in the same language in the Bible, and the Queen perhaps prays to God in the same sort of words that I do mysen, and so she wouldn't use hard ones in a grace."

The old widow's health revived considerably as the cold weather drew on. The doctor's strengthening physic, or something, had had a great effect on her; for she picked up her good looks, was very cheerful, and it was very rarely that she had any hazy overcloudings of mind; and when Mr. Westwood and his bride called upon her, about three weeks before Christmas, he told her she had grown young again to be introduced to his wife. Truly she was all

smiles and gratitude at the compliment of the call, and not a little pleased, too, to be able to judge, from her own observation, of the merits of the young lady.

Then, too, she had the pleasure of being satisfied with her friend's choice, for she told Grace Tresham, afterwards, "she thought they seemed a *noist* kind of match, and would do very well together, for they called each other 'dear,' several times, and seemed very comfortable indeed. But surely, she would have been a very queer lady that couldn't have lived comfortable with *him*; she spoke as she'd found, he was such a quiet, well-behaved young man."

A green Christmas, it is said, makes a full churchyard. If the converse be true, there would be but few funerals in the neighbourhood for some time. Snow began to fall the second week in December; and, a hard frost setting in, it lay on the ground from day to day, added to by each succeeding fall, till at last the streets and lanes were hard compact white roads, almost fitted for sledge driving, and as easy to walk upon as when there was no snow at all.

Widow Cocker's house was one of a set of cottages down a lane, surrounded by a garden enclosure, and with a walk in front of the doors, which went the whole length, and overlooked the road. Mrs. Tresham was walking down the lane a few days before Christmas-day, and, to her great surprise but real pleasure, beheld, as she passed, old Lyddy Cocker tottering, by the aid of a stick, up and down the garden-walk, and apparently enjoying the effort. A sudden thought instantly struck her, and, going through the little gate at the bottom of some steps that led up to the gardens, she joined Lyddy in her feeble walk, and fell into talk with her.

"Lyddy," said she, after a few words of congratulation and inquiry, "I've something to propose to you." "It must be in the house, then," was the old woman's answer; "for, now I'm come out, everything seems so new and fresh, I can think of nothing else but what I see. Bless you! I'm just like a child, ma'am, pleased wi' owt:" so saying, she led the way indoors.

"No bad thing either, Lyddy," said Mrs.

Tresham ; “ we’ve all to be children, at last, in spirit and humility.”

“ You say well, ma’am,” returned Lyddy, “ and its a good job when we come to it without struggling hard first.”

This subject never failed to bring some painful recollections to the old woman’s mind. Doubtless, the high spirit that gleamed from those dark eyes had known what it was to contest. It had not been given to her to pass through the valley of humility without encountering the Apollyon of the heart. But, if she had conquered, what mattered it now ?

“ You seem so nicely, Lyddy,” said Mrs. Tresham after she had sat down, “ and the weather is so bright and cheering, I have been thinking that if I were to send my chair for you—a new chair Mr. Tresham has just got for me to go about in when I am not very well—you might really come up to the Vicarage, and pay me a visit. What do you say ? Grace would be delighted.”

Poor Lyddy really did not know what to say, she was so overpowered with doubt of

being able, and yet so much pleased at the suggestion.

"Don't ye, ma'am, don't ye," cried she, "I'll think about it a bit: you're very good, but I should be in everybody's way. Dear, dear, no! I couldn't think of giving the trouble."

Such objections were soon got over; and then the question arose, when should it be? any fine day, it couldn't matter which, all days were good alike, if she were but able to come. But, after a pause, the old woman looked up at Mrs. Tresham and said, that if such a thing could be, and she really were able, she would like of all things to be inside the church again once more, before she died. She would like to see her husband's grave too, and then hear the ministers once more, "if Mrs. Tresham thought such a poor old body as she was, could be got in without disturbing other folk."

There was no fear about that; but Mrs. Tresham was startled by the suggestion, rather dreading the possible effect of the excitement on the old woman's mind. Lyddy, however, was as calm as she was earnest, and it was a

great satisfaction to find that the little hallucination respecting dining with the Queen was no longer present to her thoughts.

Nor was this a bad opportunity, Mrs. Tresham thought, of breaking through it altogether; and so she proposed to Lyddy, that her visit should take place on the following Friday, which was Christmas-day that year. No allusion was made to its being the birthday, and Mrs. Tresham avoided recalling the idea. Congratulations about that could come at a proper time and place, and a hint to the good girl Betsy prevented her making any allusions to what had been anticipated; and Mrs. Tresham left Widow Cocker, rejoicing in the little accident which had led her steps down the lane; for it struck her that this new and *realizable* prospect would create a happy diversion in the old lady's mind, and prevent her regretting the failure of her more magnificent visions.

It was a very merry Christmas-time that year; for, the weather being unusually fine, the troops of mummers and other similar sports perambulated the country, without any hind-

rance from wet ; and made the neighbourhood gay with music and fun. The waits, too, were about early and late ; but Grace Tresham had heard a good deal more of them than old Widow Cocker had, who assured her little friend, in excuse for her dulness or sleepiness, that she had slept with her deaf ear upwards that night.

It was the greatest possible pleasure to Grace to be allowed to accompany the carriage to Widow Cocker's on Christmas morning, and fetch her to church ; and the child's friendly jokes seemed to make the whole matter easy to the old woman herself. All manner of wrap-pages were sent with the carriage, and Widow Cocker never knew how she got into it, or how she was covered up, or anything about it, till she felt herself all at once going along as easy, she said, as if she was sitting in her own arm-chair ! She never felt anything *noister* in her life ! Grace and Betsy, between them, had managed it altogether. Betsy took care that the old lady was ready and waiting, and Grace and she bundled her up, and lifted her into the

carriage, without the least hesitation, and certainly without any opposition on Lyddy's part, who, with a smile on her face, "'livered herself up," as she afterwards described it, and let them do what they liked with her. How should she know what to do herself? She had never been in a carriage before!

Jack drew the carriage along the snowy road, and as they were proceeding along, Grace fell back a little behind it, and asked Betsy how she had managed her grandmother that morning, and whether she had said anything about dining with the Queen?

"Not a word, miss," was Betsy's answer. "She has not named it for weeks; but, not long after your mamma was here the other day, and invited her, she seemed to rouse up from a fit of thinking as she sat over the fire, and she called to me: 'Betsy, are all the things ready?' I didn't speak for a second, for I wasn't sure what she meant; and then she said, 'I mean the things we put by in the chest.'

"'Yes, grandmother,' I said, 'they're all right;' for I knew they were, you know, miss.



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‘ Then,’ says she, ‘ Betsy, lass, we’ll have them out to-morrow, and hang them to the fire, and they’ll be ready for me against Mrs. Tresham’s carriage comes on Christmas-day.’ So I knew by that that she had left off thinking about the Queen; and the next day we got out the chest, and hung everything by the fire; and she has never spoken a word since, but about going to church once again, and seeing grandfather’s grave, and hearing all the prayers again; and I never saw her so happy in my life before,” said Betsy in conclusion.

Grace was very glad, and nodded and smiled at old Lyddy after this explanation; and then she helped to pull the carriage along, and from time to time made the old woman smile by her youthful spirits; for even when she did not know the cause, there was something in the happiness of the child which cheered her up.

In this manner they reached the churchyard gates, when Grace Tresham left them; but they were allowed to go through in the little carriage, so that Jack was able to take his mother to a spot whence she could see with

ease the graves of her young family and husband.

The tears rolled over Jack's hard cheeks, and Betsy cried because she was sorry for grandmother, and sorry for them; but old Lyddy herself showed no emotion whatever.

She looked fixedly at the spot for a few seconds, and then, of herself, proposed moving on. "I shall be a deal better in t' church than here, Jack," said she, composedly; and, "a deal better, indeed!" she kept murmuring, till they reached the porch.

At all times there is something saddening mixed with the sweetness of fulfilled wishes; for never, till then, do we realize their insufficiency to make us as happy as we have expected.

Often and often in her declining age, since the power of walking so far had been denied her, had that poor old widow sighed for one glance at those graves; year by year had she longed to see the beautiful Christmas decorations adorning the pillars of the village church; for, owing, perhaps, to the connection from

childhood upwards of that sight with her own birthday, it had always been to her a charmed recollection.

And here she was at last, once more; and yonder, yonder, and yonder, round the church, and down the aisles, drooped the dark festoons of yew and glossy laurel-branches; while the holly, with its bright red berries, shone out amidst the other evergreens, the undoubted glory of them all.

Ay, there they were, and here was she, who had but just now looked at her husband's and childrens' graves, and must so soon be laid by their side, and who was once more come to celebrate her birthday in one of the congregations of Christ—and oh, how vain everything earthly, however lovely and beautiful, was, and seemed, after all!

Widow Cocker could not reason out the conclusion; but she came to it through her feelings involuntarily, and almost unknown to herself. She had turned away from the graves, for there was nothing there to call forth her emotions now; she was going to them, and

had long ago ceased to wish that they should come to her. And now she turned away equally even from the beautiful sight in the church, which she had so long wished to see.

For the trembling immortal on the verge of the grave and its mighty change, even the tenderest and sweetest earthly feelings are trifles light as air. There are greater things at stake, and this the heart feels, even when no argument has convinced the mind.

But a light came over her spirit at last, when once more, after the long, unavoidable absence, she listened to the solemn words with which the services of the Church open—words, which hold out the promise of peace and mercy to the whole repenting world; and which, thanks to Mrs. Tresham's carefully chosen position, and Mr. Westwood's clear reading, she was able to distinguish.

If some tears stole over the old, worn-out cheek then, they were tears of hope and thanksgiving. Here was no allusion to perishable earthly joys; no painful comparisons suggested between past and present. Age, infirmity,

sickness itself, as well as youth, and health, and strength, shared in the promise here held out; for it was a promise that led the soul forward to the thought of its future everlasting state.

Both Betsy and her father feared lest Widow Cocker's strength should fail her, if she attempted to stay for the Holy Communion, after morning service was over; but there was no persuading her to leave the church. She had been used to stay before, she said. Mr. Westwood had given her the Sacrament at home every year, and she would like to receive it now in church. She was very happy if they would let her be, and let her sit where she was. She could sit as well there as anywhere else, and she would not attempt to do more.

And so it came about that she received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; Jack and Betsy leading her to the communion rails, where, just for that short space of time, she knelt.

She was very much exhausted, certainly, after reaching the Vicarage, even although the

little carriage fetched her through the churchyard and garden walks; but, after a little careful treatment by Mrs. Tresham, she rallied, and was quite herself again in her best fashion, listening to all Miss Grace's bantering, (who amused herself by examining the curious flower groups on the chintz gown,) with a real old woman's smile of pleasure.

"They have such spirits, ma'am, you see, these young things," said she, turning to Mrs. Tresham, who was disposed to expostulate at Grace's jokes. "It does one good to be among them, I always think. Miss Grace and I know each other well, too, now, and I like to hear anything she has a mind to say."

To Lyddy's eye the large high kitchen at Mr. Tresham's was a very imposing place; and I am not sure that her mind had stretched itself to anything much grander, even in her visions of regal state. And if there were no jewels and shining stones, like the descriptions in the chapters of Revelations, there were sundry bunches of evergreens hung up among the bright tins and pans that glimmer round a well-

arranged kitchen; and these had an excellent effect.

There was, too, suspended from the middle of the ceiling, what was called the mistletoe-bough, but which was, in reality, a mixture of mistletoe with all other evergreens, and decorated with oranges and apples.

I must not tell of all Grace's pretended endeavours to persuade her old friend, and Betsy too, that this huge manufactured ball was, possibly, an orange-tree; nor how Betsy tried to keep from laughing with all her might, but at last fairly broke out in spite of herself, and felt desperately ashamed of her rudeness, till Miss Grace put an orange into her hand, as well as into Lyddy's, and told her she liked to hear her laugh, which set her at ease again.

But it was all very kind and pleasant, and passed the time away till the dinner was set on the table, at which Lyddy was comfortably seated, with her son on one side and her granddaughter on the other, when Mr. Tresham, who happened to be in the kitchen just then talking to them, said, "I will say grace for you

to-day ;” and, in an audible voice, every word of which was music to Lyddy’s ears, offered up from the head of the table a simple prayer of thanksgiving, which she could thoroughly understand. Lyddy had forgotten the Queen ; and yet, somehow or other, what was taking place reminded her of “ something like it that had happened before, or else of something she had been thinking about.” She confided as much to Betsy after dinner. “ Dear me, Betsy !” said she, “ when I heard Mr. Tresham standing up for grace, I thought I’d seen it all before ; but its nobbut an old wife’s fancy, I suppose.”

The poor old lady had enjoyed the dining there very much, though she ate but morsels of the good things placed before her ; and afterwards passed a very happy afternoon over the kitchen fire, while the family were engaged, and the servants busy in various directions. At last, just before the time Mrs. Tresham had wisely appointed for her return, Grace came and fetched her to the dining-room, where a little wine was given her, and, in a quiet way,

they all drank her health, and alluded to her great age. Mr. Tresham spoke very kindly to her, and she thanked him, and said she esteemed it a great favour to have been able to go to church again, and on such a day. Her voice sank as she spoke, and they would not suffer her to talk more, for she was evidently weary.

Once more, therefore, Grace and Betsy packed her up, and she remained passive in her hands till she found herself in the carriage again. Then, looking up, she saw Mrs. Tresham close at hand, and said, in a half inaudible voice, "Eh, you have been good, ma'am, and its been a blessed day, and I thank you!"

Mrs. Tresham nodded and smiled, and the little carriage bore away its burden to the cottage in the lane.

They got her in, and set her down by the fireside in her old armchair, with the cushion Miss Grace had worked; and she seemed quite pleased, saying, "Thank ye, thank ye, dears!" in a low voice, several times. Betsy thought her sadly tired, and set about making her a

cup of tea, glancing at the old lady from time to time, as she sat watching intently the burning up of the little bit of fire on which the kettle was placed. Her head and shoulders were bent down, and her hands were on her knees—an attitude very common to her—when suddenly, she turned round quite sharply, looked up at her granddaughter, and said, “I told you so, and nobody believed me!”

Something in the tone of her voice made Betsy start.

“Grandmother, dear, what is it?” cried she.

“Didn’t I tell you so?” she exclaimed, testily. “I always knew I should dine with the Queen to-day. Folks will believe now, I suppose;” and she smoothed down the folds of the chintz dress. “But it was grander than I thought!”

“She’s wandering, father; what shall we do?” cried Betsy, much distressed.

The simple restorative of the cup of tea was resorted to; but, after a few spoonfuls, the old widow turned away from it in dislike, and leant back in her chair.

"Nothing more," whispered she, "nothing more! you saw I took it on my knees."

"Yes, mother," said Jack, who became uneasy at her manner, "in church you know, in the house of God, that's where you've been to-day."

"God's everywhere," was the old woman's rejoinder. "Here, now, perhaps."

"With his saints," answered Jack, in a tone of love and respect.

"With repenting sinners," she whispered, as she felt about for her son's arm, that she might lay her hand upon it.

"Mother!" said Jack after a pause, and she repeated his name in reply.

"Jack!"

"Don't ye say any more about the Queen, please. You're tired, and don't know. It's Mrs. Tresham, and all of them there, you've been with, and had your dinner. Have your pipe, and go to bed now, and sleep it off."

"Ay, I've been a long way," replied the old woman, rousing up, and apparently having heard only the last part of the sentence. "It's time I was at rest, indeed!"

But she sank back again in the chair as she spoke, and presently murmured for her granddaughter.

“ Betsy, lass ! it’s all over now. I got up to the dinner, as I thought, and heard the grace. Try and think of the grace ! ‘ *The Lord make us truly thankful.* ’ It’s well the Queen remembers it, too ! ”

A long pause followed, for old Lyddy had shut her eyes ; and Betsy and her father consulted what was to be done. Old Jack was getting very nervous. He suggested trying her with her favourite pipe. It would soothe, and perhaps set her to sleep. Betsy agreed, and they lit it and brought it to her.

She looked at them out of her dark eyes, but the look was wandering and confused ; and when at last her eyes fixed on the pipe, and she gathered what they meant, she shook her head, and made a sign that she would go to bed.

Poor old Widow Cocker. This was the reaction after the excitement and fatigue of the day ; but they hoped all would be well after she got to sleep. She suffered herself to be un-

dressed, and laid down without a word of remark, beyond a whispered "thank God," as her head sank on the pillow. Betsy and her father watched her for more than ten minutes, and satisfied themselves that she had really dropt asleep. This was so far well; but there was too much irregularity about her breathing for them to lay aside anxiety.

"Make up the fire," said Jack; "I'll sit me down here;" and he seated himself in the chair by his mother's bed. The girl made a cup of tea for them both; and after that nearly an hour elapsed.

"How is she breathing now, father?" asked Betsy, getting up softly and approaching Jack.

"I don't hear it so uneasy as I did," answered he, in the same tone: "Listen, lass."

Betsy stooped to listen, but at that moment there was a movement of the clothes. Old Lyddy was certainly waking. She moved her head, opened her eyes, and looked at them both. She was fearfully pale, and her breathing was very hard; but all the confused look was gone. "Is this my hundredth birthday?"

murmured she. They told her, "Yes." "No more nonsense, dear," were her next half audible words, and the dark eyes even yet sought the face of her son.

"Better still," came next: "It's to the Lord—Himself—I'm going;" then followed a short pause, and then a whispered, "I hope"—and then she closed her eyes, and all was silent again.

It was but too evident that some fatal change had come over the poor old widow.

For some time past she had been kept up by the little excitements of hope and expectation; and the actual pleasure of the day, so long looked forward to, proved the drop that caused the brimming cup to overflow. Old Widow Cocker was dying. Betsy ran out to find some neighbour to fetch the doctor to the sick woman, for Jack would not leave his mother for an instant. He watched, rather than heard, the laboured breathing; and made a last simple effort to obtain relief. He re-lit once more the favourite pipe, and brought it to the bed. "Try it, mother dear," he entreated, as, with the fond

hope of success, he pressed it to her lips. She seemed to know what he wished, for she opened her lips, and made the effort, while Jack put his arm under the pillow, and so lifted her gently up.

But it was in vain; all power of using it was gone. For an instant the closed eyes reopened. It was only to cast a last kind look on her son. When Betsy returned, she found her father sobbing on the chair by his mother's bed, with the pipe in his hand. "She cannot draw, Betsy," he exclaimed; "she's tried, and she cannot draw. She must be dying now!"

She was indeed, or rather was she not dead already? Ever since her son withdrew his arm from the pillow all had been still, and no one ever knew at what moment the spirit passed away from the old worn-out frame.

On a less foundation than this, I doubt not, many a legend has arisen, and become the talk of the country side. Should any one therefore be told, that in the village of Burnham-in-the-Fields it is commonly believed that, whenever there is a Queen upon the throne, any old

woman who lives to be a hundred years old will dine with her, *as Lyddy Cocker did*, he need not feel surprized; for there were many people at the time, who, when they heard of the old widow's sudden death, shook their heads, and hinted that it was no wonder; vaguely implying that they really believed she had in some mysterious manner been as good as her word. To suggest to the individuals of this turn of thought, that the old lady had actually been seen at church, was mere waste of time. "Of course, people thought she had been seen there, or at the Vicarage, or somewhere, or else she would have been looked for," was the reply; but the question was, whether the *real* Widow Cocker had not in the meantime carried out her intentions, and just come back in time, as she had always said she should wish to do, to die!

But there was no end to the mysteries over Widow Cocker's death. The doctor had been out when he was sent for that evening, and was out all night. As he was riding home down the lane next morning, one of Widow Cocker's

neighbours, who was cleaning the steps by the garden-gate, stopped in her work; and, getting up from her knees, gave him the information of the event of the previous night. Naturally, he expressed surprise and regret, and made a few inquiries.

“It wanted just three minutes to nine,” was the account he received in a subdued and solemn voice, “and I was standing at the doorstead, looking out at the snow, when all at once I heard the biggest noise in Lyddy’s house, just as if some heavy thing or other had tumbled off the bed on to the floor. I went all of a chill in an instant, and you may think what my feelings was, when the next minute who should I see but Betsy running—I didn’t know then she was seekng for somebody to fetch the doctor. ‘Eh, lass,’ says I, ‘what’s amiss?’ ‘Grandmother’s ill,’ says she. ‘Ill,’ says I, ‘and you leaving her! Why, for anything you know, she’s dead! I heard a noise like I don’t know what just now, as if some one had dropt off the bed on to the floor.’”

“You don’t mean to say she really had done

so?" interrupted the doctor, aghast at the idea.

"Oh dear, no," replied the neighbour very stiffly, and with a most mysterious shake of the head.

"Then what on earth *was* the noise?" persisted the doctor rather angrily, for he had no time to waste over nonsense.

"It's not for me to say," replied the neighbour, taking up the scouring-stone, and preparing to kneel down and resume her work. "Of course it was something *consarning* her death."

This was the tale of the neighbour on one side. But the neighbour on the other was not the less favoured with supernatural indications than herself.

"They hadn't much need to come and tell *me* Lyddy was dying," remarked she, impressively; "I could have judged it before they got to the door!"

"How was that?" inquired I, to whom the account was given.

"Well, ma'am, it was a very cold night, its true, and our George had gone to bed, and the

children were in bed too, and I was ready for bed myself, for the fire had gone out, and there was nothing to sit up for. But, after I got upstairs, I bethought me that my good man had set his boots outside o' the doorstead when he came home, and that he hadn't fetched them in; so I slipt down stairs again, and unfastened the door—and its true, ma'am, I assure you—as I opened it there passed by me—the *swiftest, sweetest hush!*—and I knew directly that something had happened as surely as if I'd heard it in words; and, when the neighbour came in to tell me she was dead, I said, 'Of course!' as if I'd known it all along. Ah, poor old body! she was often in and out here, when she was able to move about better, and she knew the way well!"

Here my friend heaved a sigh, but, on very slight encouragement, started afresh. "There's a deal of talk astir about her having been at church, and up at the Vicarage that day; but I don't know what's to be said about it. I wasn't at church myself, certainly, to see, and people that did see ought to know. But I

know what poor old Lyddy talked about, and intended, and there's stranger things happens, that anybody knows anything of!"

The surprising age to which Lydia Cocker had lived, and the no less surprising manner in which she retained her faculties, together with the fact that she was a stranger by birth, and had borne away the palm for years, in the village of her adoption, both for beauty and an amount of energetic intelligence, by no means common in the district, may account, in some measure, for the mysterious reports which got abroad respecting her death. She had never been thoroughly one of themselves.

But, besides this, a belief in the supernatural is one of the instincts of our Nature; and, wherever least regulated by clearly defined notions of Faith, it is most apt to break out in absurd and capricious developments. Hence, among the ignorant and ill-conducted we may find a man who would break the commandments without the slightest apprehension—timid, nevertheless, at the notion of crossing a churchyard at night, or sitting alone with a

corpse ; nay, ready to believe the most rhodomontade tales of a spiritual visitation, made without an object, and leading to no result but that of causing people to stare. The great God of heaven and earth does not so trifle with His creatures ; but, so long as the marvel is irregular, and not in the Bible, such people as I have described are open-mouthed to take it in, and exercise an amount of Faith, of which all we can say is, that it is a pity it is not directed to those Gospel doctrines which have for their aim the purification of our moral nature, and the providing us with a sure ground of hope in time of need.

Grace Tresham wept over the grave of her old friend, and the tears stood in Mrs. Tresham's eyes too, as she listened to Betsy's account of her death, and the hope and comfort which had accompanied it. It was well, indeed, for the old Widow that the long trials of her fiery spirit ended so sweetly and peacefully ; that the years of submission to God's will in life had prepared her to accept His guidance with childlike trust, wherever it might lead : yea,

even when it led through the valley of the shadow of death.

And oh ! happy for her it was, that when, in the short *lightness* before death, the innocent hallucination which had cheered the years of her weak old age departed, it was succeeded by a brighter vision, and a more exalted hope ; that although the poor old Widow went not, on her hundredth birthday, to the Palace of an earthly Queen, she closed her eyes that night in her humble cottage, trusting to awake to consciousness in “ a house not made of hands, eternal in the Heavens,” in the presence of the King of kings, the God of the fatherless and the widow.



THE TREASURE-SEEKER.

A LEGEND OF BONNEVAL.

INTRODUCTION.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.”



WHEN *Æsop*'s cock found the precious stone on the dunghill, he turned it over with contempt, and pursued his search for something more suited to his own particular wants and wishes; and, by doing so, he proved himself to be a treasure-seeker of the wisest and most philosophical description.

Some people may be disposed to quibble at this conclusion, and to argue that it was only in consequence of the cock's ignorance, and lower standard of requirements, that he preferred the barley-corn to the diamond. He

was incapable, (they would say,) from his inferiority, of appreciating the greater intrinsic worth of the gem.

It would be a grand thing if people knew what they meant when they used such high-sounding phrases as "intrinsic worth!" We speak of the "intrinsic worth" of a diamond, as if it was the acknowledged fact of the universe; whereas we, temporary travellers in a world which we are merely passing through, mean nothing but its value in a particular money-market, where a certain quantity of gold would be given in exchange for it.

Take it to the islands of the south seas, where, what we should be disposed to call trumpery little shells, would be offered as its equivalent; and then you can sit down and meditate to some purpose on the intrinsic worth of a gem. On your return home the shells would probably fetch only a few pence, and you, if you had agreed to the exchange, would find yourself very much in the position of Hans in Luck, when he had, by much ingenuity, converted his bar of gold into a grindstone;

only you would not be, I fear, quite so contented as the hero of the German tale.

No! there is, in point of fact, no greater intrinsic worth in the diamond than in the barley-corn. Nay, that which serves as an article of food may justly claim to have the advantage over a useless bauble, the value of which lies solely in the value we set upon it. Of "intrinsic worth" there is no question whatever.

Having thus defended Æsop's cock from the charge of inferiority in judgment, I proceed to more general remarks.

Very few things in this life have any intrinsic worth; so few, that it is generally only a delusion we practise upon ourselves when we use the phrase. The standard of nominal value is regulated by our wants, wishes, and even whims; and, as the variety of those is endless, so is the difference of opinion endless as to the value of the treasures of life.

That we are all, however, treasure-seekers in our way, there can be no manner of doubt. Every man has his own little circle of interests and excitements—undivulged, in many cases,

to even his nearest and dearest. Every man has his own little castle in the air, to which he is constantly travelling on the soothing wings of fancy, when the world around him becomes flat or annoying. Every man has his favourite train of thought, his more particularly cherished hope, his secret aspiration, his idea of the possible perfection of life.

“ Every beloved object,” says Novalis, “ is the centre of a paradise.” Oh, that we would all take heed that the centre of our respective paradises held a treasure worthy of the name ! Worthy of all the interest, and excitement, and love, and worship, and seeking, we bestow upon it !

Whatever may be thought generally of the wisdom of our old friend the cock’s judgment in his selection of a treasure, all will admit that it was, undoubtedly, a wise one *for a cock* ; and the cock, therefore, had at any rate the great merit of knowing what was of real value to himself ; of not being diverted from his search by a conventional delusion ; and of persevering to the end.

Can as much be said of the mass of rational beings? It is to be feared not.

There is treasure-seeking, it is true, as I said, in all directions; but the things which we consider as such, and the modes by which we seek to obtain them, are as different as light is from darkness; and—

“ How distant oft the thing we dote on most,
From that for which we dote—felicity ! ”

What delusions we pass through; what blunders we commit; what follies we disgrace ourselves by, before we set up (if, indeed, we ever do), as a centre of our paradise of secret thought and enjoyment, anything deserving the worship of an immortal creature!

But again, among those who have rightly selected their treasure, how many are apt to fall short of the cock's wisdom in their mode of pursuing it? Knowing what is of real value to themselves, they (unlike him) are but too often diverted from their search by conventional delusions, or fail of persevering to the end.

Alas, that it should be so! and alas, too, if such persons should fancy themselves above

taking a lesson from the humble creature of whom we have spoken!—of looking into life, and seeing, that, even where the object is a mistaken one, there is a merit, worthy all commendation, in the searching diligently till we have found what we believe to be essential to our happiness.

It is reported that, in a sister isle, there is an organized society for heiress-hunting; that is to say, for obtaining a fortune through the medium of a matrimonial alliance.

A club of gentlemen, who have set before themselves a rich wife as the great desideratum of life, subscribe a trifle each, annually, to defray the expenses of a yearly journey of one of their guild (chosen by lot) to certain celebrated watering-places in England, where he may lay siege to the heart and purse of any young lady who may be visiting in the neighbourhood, (like himself,) in a nominal search of health and a little change.

This is earnest treasure-seeking, but of a complicated kind; involving the risk of losing as much comfort in one way as is gained in an-

other. But the fraternity alluded to have, it is to be presumed, weighed all the costs. They are prepared to throw a shawl over a hump, if the riches cannot be had without one; or to escape an ungenial temper by resorting to their club, should that unhappy defect be the inevitable accompaniment of the coin.

And here, whatever we may think of the object these men have in view, or of the means they use to secure it, there can be no doubt that they, like the cock, have the merit of having decided on what they want, and of working resolutely, and undiverted by conventional opinions, to that end.

More cannot be expected from life than that a man should ascertain what is essential to his individual happiness, pursue it with unremitting zeal, and obtain it if he can.

Only let him beware that he does not build up so admirable a structure upon a loose foundation! Only let him examine beforehand, lest he should grasp success and disappointment together!

In olden times, some centuries ago, when a

superstitious religion made general superstition a still more common thing than it is at present; when neither prince nor peasant saw any reason why the charms of the necromancer should not prevail as well as the charms of the priest; when the miracles worked by pictures and relics, which men were *required* to believe, made them credulous of the possibility of anything they *wished* to believe,—treasure-seeking, of a very material and tangible sort, was in vogue, and in some cases became a perfect rage.

Offering all the irresistible attractions of a short cut to fame and fortune, it was equally acceptable to the discontented man who had failed in other ways, and to the idle youth who had no fancy for any occupation which involved mental or bodily labour. And the pursuit, when once indulged in, possessed a morbid fascination for its victims, which soon (like that of gambling) bade defiance to reason and the results of experience, and fed upon the excitement of even disappointment itself.

This sort of treasure-seeking, born as it was

of superstition, was fostered by the old traditions and legendary beliefs which from time to time crept into currency, no one could exactly say how.

Few facts in the natural history of the human race are more interesting and satisfactory than its inveterate belief in the supernatural. Through all the horrors and abominations of savage pagan creeds, the one consolatory feature remains, that men of all races and ages have a conviction, amounting to instinct, of a something beyond this world, to be hoped for, feared, and worshipped.

Philosophers may endeavour, as they please, to reason out the delusion; and the dissolute liver may try to laugh down those established moral laws which are built upon a creed that demands sobriety and honesty of life. But it is all in vain. Crush down the instinct in one corner, and it rises up with proportionate force in another. Discard religion, and superstition will rise in her place, and rule with a rod of iron terror; for nature will not be baulked of her rights; and the already half-immortal creature,

though fettered by its earthly tabernacle, must have something to believe.

Observe the working of this fact at the present day, and in cases where you would least expect to find it at all. See the philosopher, who reasoned himself long ago out of all faith in the Gospel, succumbing, without a moment's hesitation, to the spiritual pretensions of some *soirée*-giving lady, with a *cóterie* of miraculously-endowed mediums.

See the man who would argue and dispute about the possibility of Christ's coming again to judge the world, believing that his own great grandfather's spirit has returned from its resting-place to have a chat with him through the leg of a mahogany dinner-table!

See the village drunkard come reeling home to his wife, in terror, and half-sobered for once, because, in returning from his midnight orgies, he has *seen something* which has made known to him that one of his family is about to die!

"If it be nobbut *thee*, it'll be a rare good job," is the wife's cordial salutation.

"Thou's wrang there, woman," is the re-

joinder. "It's not to be me. I nobbut wish I was as sure it wad be *thee*!"

See this man, who lives without the fear of God, and yet trembles before a shadow! See him who has no knowledge of a future state, yet believes that a spécial summons to death has been revealed to him! . . .

But let us be thankful that it is so; let us be thankful that when a man has either reasoned or sinned himself out of religion, superstition is ever near at hand to keep his head out of the mire of materialism.

Believe something beyond this world we all must, and do. Let us hope that, now and then, superstition may lead her votaries back to a purer and more rational faith.

In the town of Bonneval in France, a place situated on the river Loir (not la Loire, but *le Loir*, a branch of it), a strange legend at one time prevailed; a legend of treasure-seeking in its most distinctive form. It purported that all hidden treasures could be discovered in Bonneval, and its surrounding neighbourhood, by any one who should search for them at the

time when the priest was reading the Genealogy during the performance of the midnight mass on Christmas-eve.

All things considered, it was a well-devised legend ; for the period named was so brief, that any failures in attempts built upon it, could easily be attributed to the fact that the magical time had been anticipated or passed over before the spot had been reached ; or that some saint had counteracted the charm in consequence of the seeker's having deserted the service of the temple in favour of that of Mammon. Also, to the credit of the times be it spoken, there were but a few, and those very reckless spirits, who would have dared to forsake the Church in the midst of so solemn a service, on so worldly a pretence ; and if any did so, and failed in their object, they were sure to keep their failure to themselves.

Whilst, therefore, this semi-religious legend seemed to countenance the treasure-seeking of the day, of which designing men made a very profitable business, there was but little danger of its bringing the pursuit into discredit by numerous disappointments.

But the adventure of one treasure-seeker of the district of Bonneval I am going to put upon record, and my readers must make their own conclusions upon its result. Whether they will consider it a success or a failure will depend on the tone of their own mind, and on the nature of their views of life.

To give another turn to *Æsop's* fable, it must be remembered that sometimes when we are looking for a barley-corn, we may chance to come upon a precious stone.

God is often more merciful to us than we are to ourselves.

Bonneval is now a manufacturing town, and its old monastery of Benedictine monks was long ago converted into a corn-market. It figures on the ancient map of the once extensive "Comté de Blois," as a border town of that delicious region of France, so rich in forests and rivers, so prolific in grain, which included within its limits several towns of historical interest and importance, as Blois and Romorantin; but more especially Châteaudun, which was so celebrated for its pure keen air, and the still

keener wits of its inhabitants, that it originated a proverb, "He comes from Châteaudun, he understands with half-a-word."*

"I said more especially Châteaudun," because that town is more connected with the fate of the treasure-seeker of Bonneval than the others I have named.

Outwardly remarkable for its beautiful position, being situated on the side of an eminence, in a valley surrounded by hills, both it and the territory round it, were renowned in olden times for several mysterious peculiarities, besides that of the wit of its inhabitants. On one side of the town, for instance (towards the north), all the vines that were planted produced verjuice from their grapes instead of wine: but, though the historian records not on what occasion this misfortune commenced, he leaves us to suppose that it was a visitation, and had not always been the case.

Again, there was formerly near Châteaudun a fountain, named the fountain "des Jalans," which, according as its waters rose or fell, pre-

* Il est de Châteaudun, il entend à demy mot.

saged favourable or unfavourable seasons for the country, "et cela est si assuré," quoth the chronicler, "que ces vilains hommes, qui font leur félicité de la misère publique, reglent l'employ de leurs deniers en l'achat des bleds, sur le pied de l'état où se trouve cette fontaine."*

In another quarter we find a marshy river, "La Conie," whose waters are augmented neither by snow or rain in winter, but, contrary to other rivers, swell and increase during the heats of summer; and if ever this stream overflows its banks (which it does but seldom), fatal experience has proved that the event is a sure presage of famine, pestilence, or war!

Our readers will not care to investigate further the superstitions of Châteaudun; but neither will they wonder at them, when they hear that it was the birthplace of a celebrated French astrologer and physician, Florent de Villiers, who, it is not unreasonable to conjecture, may have bequeathed to his native town some of the traditions we have described; as he died in all the ardour of astrological fame, having publicly

* Histoire de Blois, p. 219.

taught the science, and been honoured by the visits of royalty itself.*

A remarkable natural curiosity of the place remains to be noticed. A vast subterranean vault, commonly called "The Gulf," which appears to have been formed by Nature for the preservation of the town from certain inundations of the river, with which it is occasionally threatened in the winter, during heavy rains and storms. As it is, the waters, finding in that huge receptacle a natural and congenial outlet for their abundance, give but little disturbance to the peaceful inhabitants of Châteaudun.

These matters have been touched upon, as bearing on the tale that follows.

* Charles VIII.



THE TREASURE-SEEKER.

A LEGEND OF BONNEVAL.



SHOULD'NT have known you, Mr. Adrian!" said the old woman.

"A nurse not know her foster-child, after only a two years' absence, Christine?" answered the young man. "Incredible!"

"But you're so altered, sir," continued Christine, as she bustled to take away a wet travelling cloak, and hang it over a chair to dry.

"It must be for the better then, luckily," observed the young man, gaily. "I, you know, nurse, couldn't change for the worse."

"I know no such thing, Mr. Adrian," re-

plied Christine, stopping in her walk across the brick floor. "How should I?"

"Because I was everything bad and ugly before I went away. You surely don't mean to tell me I'm come back worse and uglier still?"

There was a slight bitterness, only too perceptible, in the tone of the joke.

"*I* never said you were ugly," responded old Christine.

"No; but one did, who ought to be a better judge than you," remarked Adrian.

"Mr. Adrian," said Christine, coming close up to the chair on which the young man was sitting, in front of a wood-fire that was piled up on the hearth; "don't be bringing up what your mother has said to jest at. You have no need to mind it, of course, for she was never much of a mother to you; but don't make a jest of it, for it makes me angry to hear it."

"I have not had to be reprov'd often for too much jesting, Christine!" remarked the youth, sadly.

The old woman had been moving away, but

she stopped short when she heard this observation; fixed her eyes on her foster-child, and looked more than half disposed to cry.

"Bad and ugly!" murmured she, as she gazed on Adrian's open face and manly figure with pride and affection. "They must be fools who think it. But never mind! you've grown ruddy and well," she added, "and it does one's heart good to see you!"

"Change of air, nurse!" cried Adrian, turning from the fire to meet the old woman's gaze.

"Ay! but you look so pleasant and happy too!" added she.

"Change of company, that," responded Adrian, with a smile. "There's nothing like getting away from home for being made much of, nurse! You shall go with me next time, and try."

"You've found friends, then?" asked Christine, with eager interest; and now, as she spoke, she sat down so as to face her foster-child.

"Plenty!" answered he; laying a stress on the word, and returning her anxious look of inquiry with a steady one of assurance.

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed the old woman, warmly; and there was a pause, which was broken by the young man.

"I can't face them to-night, Christine—can you shelter me here?"

A pleasant assent was the answer; although in the same breath the old woman lamented her want of proper accommodation—a regret which Adrian cut short at once.

"No apologies, Christine!" cried he; "or I shall think I am not welcome, and run away. But come! its settled now, so sit still awhile, and tell me more about my people. My brother is really at Châteaudun, you say?"

A shake of the head and a dismal "Ay!" was Christine's only answer.

"Did he never take to the business at all, after I left them two years ago?"

"Only for a few months, Mr. Adrian. Just for that short time it seemed to be going on as usual; but then, all at once, he grew restless and idle, and the next thing I heard was, that he had put it all into the hands of an agent, and was gone."

"And have you heard how he passes his time at Châteaudun?" inquired Adrian. "Has he any occupation, any real business? Does he do anything?"

"I should be sorry to say he did," answered Christine, gravely. "From all I can learn it's all flash and gaiety from one day to another, and has been ever since he went."

"But how then——;" and here Adrian stopped short, and looked Christine in the face.

"Ay, I know, I know!" responded Christine, rocking her head backwards and forwards. "Why, any fool may see what it must all come to! When your poor dear father's money is gone, and nothing has been added to it, they'll all be finished up together. Just that! Oh, Mr. Adrian!" added the old woman, with tears in her eyes, and laying her hand on her foster-child's arm; "you do say, don't you? that you have found friends, and are doing well yourself; tell me again, dear heart, do! You won't be mixed up in this mess any way?"

"Never fear for me," answered Adrian; "I

have been willing to labour, and God has sent me work."

"And will you tell me then, sir?" cried Christine, troubled, and evidently puzzled also; "will you tell me what *can* have brought you back? You can help nothing here. They hav'nt loved you, nor treated you like a son or a brother; they scorned your advice when you gave it; they almost bade you begone about your business. What has brought you back, to be troubled by theirs?"

"The thought of my father, Christine," was Adrian's answer.

Christine was silent, but shook her head sorrowfully, as if not satisfied yet.

"It was on his death-bed," continued Adrian, "that he charged my brother to take care of his—*our*—mother, remember; and it has come across me again and again, since I have been away, that if Claude should forget, what would become of her? The duty is binding upon me as well as him."

Christine continued to shake her head sorrowfully, and Adrian added—

“ And what *is* becoming of her, Christine !” but less as a question than an ejaculation.

“ She’s troubled, it’s true,” observed Christine; “ at least that’s my belief; but she’ll let no one know her heart, and so what good can be done? She pretends all’s well, and talks of what great things Mr. Claude is to do some of these fine days, but nobody knows when. How this great lord, and that grand lady, say he’s the handsomest, and most accomplished young man that’s ever been seen or known in Châteaudun; and, meanwhile, everybody here is asking where the money’s coming from that buys the grand clothes and horses the young man wants; and where the money’s going to, that old Mr. Genest laboured all his life to get together into a nice little business for his twin sons. Ah! it makes an old woman’s heart break to look on, and be forced to sit still!”

Adrian Genest—for such was the young man’s name—sat gazing before him for a time in silence, after the conclusion of his foster-mother’s speech. Then suddenly looking up again, he said—

•

"One other thing, Christine. The Notary's daughter—that bright, loving Mathilde?" . . .

"Nay, where's the use of asking after her, Mr. Adrian!" cried Christine, bitterly. "Any one may guess how that would end, without asking—poor lass!"

The old woman said no more.

"He has deserted her, then!" exclaimed Adrian, impetuously, and rising from his seat. "I feared as much!"

"You might have been certain of it at once," replied Christine. "But observe me, sir, *that's* where his sins will find him out some day, though he does'nt think so now. He has loved her years and years, and she's put many a blessed thought into his heart, if he had but held them fast; and he loves her still—I'm certain he does—though word has come, again and again, of his marriage that is to be with a lady of the Court that visits at Châteaudun at her father's house."

"Downright nonsense!" exclaimed Adrian, pacing impatiently ~~over~~ the cottage-floor. "My brother is handsome enough, and taking enough,

for us country folk, who see nothing better, and know but little of the great world. But Court ladies are not so keen in running after country birds, I suspect, however well they may look in their own woods. What a fool my brother must be making of himself!" added he; and with this observation he resumed his seat.

"I wonder whether Miss Mathilde ever thinks so too!" ejaculated Christine. "She seems sad enough at times it's true, but at other times there's a look about her as if she had got beyond trouble, and knew more than we any of us did."

"And so she does, I'll be bound," said Adrian, gravely; "for she knows how to bear trouble with courage, as well as Christian submission. There was not such another girl in Bonneval, when I left it, as Mathilde de Tessier. Well! I will say it once more. My brother has made a fool of himself, to exchange the Bonneval Notary's daughter against the gayest lady of the land!"

There was an uneasy anxiety in the glance

with which Christine now looked up at Adrian; but he only laughed, when he divined her thoughts.

“It’s only a free heart that can praise as warmly as I have done,” cried he. “Never fear for me, Christine, I am safe.”

The tone of the young man’s voice seemed to reassure Christine, for she soon after left Adrian to his own meditations, while she went to prepare a little chamber for his night’s rest.

Adrian Genest was, as the conversation just given will have partially made known to our readers, one of the twin sons of a merchant of Bonneval in France, who had amassed a comfortable fortune, by steady industry, and an intelligence never diverted from whatever object he had in view.

He had married a lady of Châteaudun, of higher connections than his own, but of very inferior sense; who brought to the manufacturing town of Bonneval a good many foolish fine notions with her pretty face, and who was the most injudicious of mothers.

As the two boys grew up, she betrayed a

marked difference of feeling towards them. Claude, whose refined beauty, graceful figure, and precocious manners, were the theme of her constant admiration; she idolized with a fondness as unjust and injudicious as it was injurious to its object; for the petted child turned quickly into the wilful boy, and the wilful boy into a headstrong and conceited youth, who, in the natural course of things, tyrannized over his mother as well as everybody else. In fact he believed at last what he had been so perpetually taught, namely, that he was a great deal too good for the station of life in which God had placed him, and that he should certainly some day (exactly how, he never attempted to define) astonish the world, soar into some more elevated sphere, and leave his admiring friends and relatives far behind him.

Adrian, meanwhile, with rough homely features, and an odd bluntness of manner, the result of natural shyness, took a quite secondary position in the house, and was contented to do so. Nobody ever surmised that that heavy brow, out of proportion as it was with the

features below it, might possibly indicate a steady power of mind, of which the contour of an Apollo would have given no hope. He was judged superficially, and found wanting accordingly. He was snubbed, found fault with, and laughed at; and, justly or unjustly, had to endure it all, and make the best of it, for there was no second court of appeal. Happily for himself, he went on learning and bearing, without a murmur; and, while never for a moment questioning the superiority of the much-preferred brother, he was attaining it himself through sheer hard work and modesty. It was a wholesome, if not an agreeable training.

Of all this the Bonneval Merchant himself knew nothing. He was taciturn and reserved at all times: far too busy by day to inquire what went on, and too little energetic at night to notice how the two boys were growing up together, and how their mother was, without intending it, doing her best to ruin them both.

Before they had completed their education—Claude under the tutorship of a distant relative of Mdme. Genest's, who had taken refuge in

Bonneval from the storms of a blundering life, and was now the chief notary of the place, and Adrian in the school of the Benedictine Monastery, under the care of an old friend of his father's, who had adopted the religious life—the Bonneval merchant, M. Genest, suddenly died !

The event fell like a thunderbolt into the house, where everybody was off their guard. Mdme. Genest murmured out the strange but expressive idea, that “ nothing seemed to be ready for M. Genest's death.” It was the only remarkable thing she had ever said in her life, and she did not herself know how remarkable it was. It never struck her what a comment it was upon the “ rising early, and late taking rest,” that the most important event of life should have been the one least remembered, and provided against. Nothing was ready indeed; no one was prepared for so great a bereavement. Mdme. Genest, who had never known care or labour before, had now her full share of both. But she managed to conduct the business, by the help of an agent, until her boys were able to

undertake it for themselves; after which she resigned it into their hands, in the confident hope that now at last her troubles and trials were over, and that she should reap the fruits of them in a declining age of leisure and comfort, under the affectionate care of both her sons.

Never did a calculation fall wider of the mark! The two boys, thanks to the mother's folly on the one hand, and the friendly monk's wisdom on the other, came together in partnership, as incongruous in dispositions, and as opposed in views and principles as light and darkness.

Adrian, patient and resolutely industrious, thoughtful, too, and judicious, was content to labour in the field before him, waiting God's blessing on the work, and perfectly contented with it.

Claude, indulged and irritable, hampered, even through his quickness and ability, by a sensation that the necessary drudgery was unworthy of his exalted powers, was soon sick of the concern, and everlastingly hankering after some wild speculation or delusive scheme, by

which he might make a short cut to fame and fortune. In vain Adrian expostulated, protested, advised, and even besought. His despised brother's superior sagacity was almost more galling to Claude than anything else; and after contriving to make every one around him disturbed and miserable, he one day threatened to draw out his share of property from the concern, quit the neighbourhood altogether, and leave Adrian and his mother to manage for themselves as best they could.

A more ridiculous threat, or one less likely to be carried into execution, was never uttered; but Mdme. Genest affected to believe it, and burst into a storm of indignation and grief. She threw all the blame upon the unfortunate Adrian, heaped a torrent of abuse upon his head for perpetually opposing his brother in all his wishes, for rendering his life wretched, and for driving him from the place. She would listen to no explanation, and hear no defence; and intent upon the sole object of showing favour to Claude, in order to induce him to remain at Bonneval, she sacrificed truth, justice, and even

her own convictions, to her irrational and cruel preference.

Little had Mdme. Genest dreamt, all her life, of the heart and spirit she was trifling with, when she heaped one injustice upon another on the head of her son Adrian ; neither did she intend any other result to arise from her present violent outbreak, than that Claude should resume his business as before.

But the young man Adrian, with cultivated faculties, firm character, and a strong sense of right and wrong, was no longer only a shy, ugly boy, who could be dragged hither and thither, at a moment's notice, by her absolute will.

On the following morning he had done what his brother had threatened to do—he had left the place.

A kind but remonstrating letter to his mother set forth his reasons, and consigned her to his brother's care and love. He intrusted the guardianship of his share of the property to the Benedictine monk, but left it in the hands of his mother and brother for the benefit of the

firm. He took nothing with him but the half-yearly allowance which was allotted by agreement to himself and his brother for casual expenses; and with this, and a letter of introduction from the monastery to a merchant's house in Blois, he left Bonneval for an indefinite period.

His unannounced return, at the end of two years, was the result of the bitter anxiety he felt for his mother, distrusting, as he did, his brother's selfish habits and frivolity.

And he came back, as we have seen, to find his apprehensions fully realized. Claude was still at Châteaudun; although when he first insisted on going there, soon after Adrian's departure, it had been stipulated that he should return at the end of a few months, at latest. But the months had rolled on to far more now than even a year, and he was there yet, immersed in gaiety, and careless of everything but what is vulgarly called "cutting a good figure in the world,"—the most miserably unreal of all objects which a man sets before himself as desirable.

He only made himself remembered, from time to time, at home, by demands for money : demands which his weak-minded mother first refused, and then granted, as regularly as the occasions arose.

Truly Adrian had subject enough for meditation, as he sat over his foster-mother's fire, and thought over the past and the future !

The fact of his own success and prosperity, with the friends to whom the Benedictine monk had introduced him, shrunk into insignificance when he thought of his mother's disappointed hopes, his brother's restless life, and the probable ruin of the property gathered together with so much labour and care.

" Nurse !" said he, mournfully, when Christine returned from her preparations, " I begin to wonder with you, what I can have come here for, and I think the best thing I can do will be to go back again whence I came. If my mother is still so infatuated, I can do her no good ; and the brother who scorned me at Bonneval will do so still more at Châteaudun. As to my share in the property, they may take

it and welcome ; it will defer their own misery for a few months more at any rate ; and I have every prospect before me of earning a fortune for myself. It is too true—Adrian Genest is neither useful nor beloved among his family and natural friends. I will sleep here to-night, and to-morrow return to Blois. I am neither wanted, nor wished for, at home.”

With these words the unhappy young man crossed his arms on the table and buried his face in them, as if to shut himself out from every sight and sound.

Christine Salviati, with whom the ugly twin Adrian had been put to nurse in his infancy, was one of those rare instances of natural refinement and good sense, which one is tempted to think could scarcely have been improved upon by a higher education, inasmuch as that might possibly have taken away a portion of the simplicity of character, which formed so charming a substratum to all her other good qualities. She had loved her little nursling with the most intense affection ; her own black-eyed Zamet was not dearer in her eyes than the

despised offspring of the Bonneval merchant ; and the more his own mother neglected and ill-treated him, the more warmly did Christine endeavour, by all the simple means in her power, to soften the child's fate to himself.

Nor did her efforts stop at mere kindness and affection. In her humble way she acted counsellor and spiritual teacher to the forlorn little boy.

"Pray to God and do your duty, Master Adrian," she would say, "and never give a wrong word in return for one, and you'll see they'll all love you at last. Any way, you'll be pleasing God, and that's the only thing that's worth caring about in this world." "Who knows," was another of her remarks, "but what, if you hadn't had these little bits of crossings and thwartings to keep you down, you might have been a wilful bad boy, without a bit of grace or humility about you, and getting into all manner of evil ways ! Any how, it's God's will that it should be as it is, so it's sure to be for the best."

The Benedictine monk may in after years

have worded the instruction better, when Adrian confided his sorrows to his ear ; but the teaching could scarcely have gone beyond that of the simple old nurse.

Christine's husband had been a Maltese courier—one of those vividly intelligent foreigners who seem gifted by nature with the art of adapting themselves to all characters, and making themselves useful in all situations of life ; and his union with the quietly sensible, placid, blue-eyed Christine, may be considered one of those marriages of contrast which are supposed to be so supremely happy.

In this case it was very fairly so ; but the happiness ended only too soon, and Christine was left a widow with an only son. She was comfortably provided for, however ; for Zamet the elder had laid by a little independence, and his widow was thereby enabled to pass the remainder of her days without the anxiety of personal toil.

Still fair and fresh looking, and possessing a youthful vitality of mind, surprising at her age, Christine stood over her troubled foster-son,

counselling with herself what suggestions to offer.

But the case was beyond her powers, and she felt it to be so.

"I can't tell which way to think or advise to-night, sir," observed she, at last; "but perhaps when we've slept upon it, and prayed upon it, we may see a little clearer."

Almost involuntarily, and as if he had still been a child, Adrian Genest obeyed this summons to break up the conference; and after offering his cheek to Christine for a friendly kiss, he bade her good-night, and retired to rest in the little chamber she had prepared.

The frost had now continued for weeks, and it was close upon Christmas. Adrian Genest had been attracted back to his home at this particular moment, in some measure, perhaps, from the old recollections of this cheerful season of the gathering of friends. If ever he would be welcome to his mother and that one brother, surely it would be now.

So, at least, perhaps, he had almost uncon-

sciously felt when he decided on leaving Blois ; but it was wonderful how these hopeful emotions subsided as he approached the time of the experiment. Waking in his foster-mother's cottage on the bitterly cold morning that succeeded his journey—watching as he did the dusty snow adding its daily mite to the already heavily-laden roofs—a corresponding chill seemed to seize on his imagination, and his strongest sensation was an impatient desire to get away as quickly as he could.

Welcomed ? when, where, should he ever be welcomed ? Not now, not here, certainly. From his little pallet he watched the tiny flakes as they drizzled lazily down through the dark still atmosphere, and thought of his mother, and what she would say—nay, perhaps, rather of what she would *not* say—until an absolute dread came over him, lest she should hear of his presence in Bonneval, and insist on an interview.

Truly, though he had slept upon it, and prayed upon it, the way seemed no clearer than before ! No course seemed open but a hasty purposeless return ; and under this impression he rose, and

dressed as quickly as he could. The very exertion refreshed him ; and after he had found his way along the passage to Christine's " best parlour," where she had warned him he was to breakfast, he had a pleasant little friendly joke ready for her ear.

Little did he expect, as he opened the door of the room, to find it occupied by the pretty daughter of the notary to whom his brother was affianced !

" Adrian ! "—" Mathilde ! "—were the startled greetings exchanged betwixt them, and then the surprise of both was succeeded by a shade of annoyance, for both felt a wish that they had not thus met.

Neither of them, however, lost their presence of mind. Mathilde even less so than her companion, and she relieved his embarrassment by addressing him frankly at once.

" You are surprized at seeing me here, and, I fear, are annoyed by my presence ? "

" Impossible ! " answered Adrian, " I can never be otherwise than glad to see you ; but I cannot help wishing that we could have met in

circumstances that would have allowed you to regard me as a relative and friend, rather than as a stranger whose brother has done so much to hurt your feelings, and of whom, and whose family and name, you must, indeed, be weary."

"Adrian Genest!" said Mathilde, in a tone of dignified sweetness, "do not let us waste time in useless words. There can be no question of weariness while a hope remains of doing good. Let us speak together henceforth and for ever as friends who have one common interest at heart. I believe," added she, with the slightest possible hesitation in her manner, "that I am speaking to one who will not misunderstand my motives, but who can appreciate and understand my feelings."

Mathilde's was a character of that pure and self-reliant kind of which perfect candour is a necessary development, and in this case it prevented the embarrassment which must otherwise have arisen from her avowing a continued interest in the career of a lover who seemed to be indifferent to her claims upon him. She opened, therefore, at once, her confidence to Adrian,

assuring him that she was convinced of his brother's real goodness of heart, through all his errors, let others dispute it as they pleased. That he had been all his life warped, misguided, and carried away by false views instilled into him by those who might easily have directed him aright, she had every reason to know. That, by God's blessing, it might be possible to reclaim him, she could not for a moment doubt. And that a crisis of his fate was approaching, in which something might be actively done, she had good reason to suspect. Even of his continued attachment to herself she entertained no doubt, notwithstanding the reports of his approaching marriage.

"He cannot help loving me," exclaimed she, with a kindling eye and firm enthusiasm. "He can find no second Mathilde, I know! Old and young at the same moment, from the independent solitude of my motherless life, I have been counsellor, friend, father, mother, all to him at once, in the midst of my love; and what has passed between us he can never forget."

She paused a moment, and then added, grave-

ly: "I do not think that such bonds are easily broken. This, however, is but a secondary consideration. Folly of the wildest kind, if not ruin and danger, are before him now; and something must be done."

Adrian, considerably alarmed, pressed for an explanation, and Mathilde proceeded:—

"Claude was in Bonneval, yesterday."

"Returned then?" exclaimed Adrian. "And I, too, at the same moment.—How strange.—And you met?"

"Nay, nay," answered Mathilde, shaking her head; "he came over on weightier business than to seek me out! An incredibly large sum of money, far larger than he had ever drawn out before, he demanded, and finally insisted on having, in spite of tears and prayers and the bitterest remonstrances on the part of his miserable mother. Forced into submission to his will, she gave her authority at last, and he obtained the money. But —" and here again Mathilde hesitated, and looked anxiously into Adrian's face,— "the property is so reduced by these incessant drains, that very little more re-

mains than the original third share which belongs to you. The agent came last night to my father to warn him of what was approaching, in the vain hope, perhaps, that something could be done—through me—to influence Claude. He wished also to know where you could be found.

“It was too late last night,” continued Mathilde, “to make any effort; but my father’s first idea this morning was, that I should visit your foster-mother, from whom I might hope, at any rate, to learn whither you had gone. And now you understand my unexpected appearance here. It is wonderful that I should have found you yourself.”

Adrian got up and paced the room for a few seconds. Then he stopped short before Mathilde, and spoke:—

“It is all very easily settled,” said he. “Every farthing of what was mine shall be theirs, only it must be secured in such a manner that even my mother cannot totally ruin herself and him, by allowing it to be squandered in folly. Your father, perhaps, can be trusted in this?”

"Ay, ay," answered Mathilde, mechanically, but she turned upon Adrian a countenance overflowing with emotion.

"And *you*, Adrian?" said she.

"Am on the road to earn my own fortune—a competency, at any rate—by patient labour and industry. God's appointed road to happiness on earth, Mathilde! But come!" continued he, "this is no such serious matter, after all! I breathe freely again; nay, I am twice myself, now I know that I am available for good to those whom nature, at any rate, has bound closely enough to my heart! Look, Mathilde! *I* will believe all *you* believe of my brother, and look forward to a happy day for us all, when necessity has compelled him to lay aside folly, and better teachings have roused up all the good in his heart ——."

But here Adrian checked himself suddenly; for Mathilde's face, instead of brightening, was becoming more and more overshadowed by signs of unmistakable distress.

"Why, Mathilde, are you not satisfied?" cried he, wondering. "What more can possibly be done?"

"Nothing, as regards the money," answered she.

"Is there anything else, then? Have you not told me all?"

Mathilde shook her head.

"No! The most difficult part remains behind."

"His awakening to higher views of life, then; is that it? Oh, Mathilde, these changes are in the hand of God!"

"Not that, not that," murmured Mathilde; "but he has fallen into the power of impostors."

"Impostors!" exclaimed Adrian. "Of what sort?"

"Astrologers, diviners, treasure-finders, I fear. My father met him in the town yesterday, and he boasted to him of the learning and wonderful gifts of one of his new friends. Ah! my father has had but too much reason to detest the very mention of the juggling race. He warned Claude, but it was evidently in vain."

"But my brother," remarked Adrian, "was a person whom I never considered even ———"

well, well," he added, "I, who was brought up in a religious house, had far greater advantages, of course. What I mean is, Claude's temperament, or habit, was certainly not that of ready belief."

"An unsettled faith, and imperfect moral practice,—is not that the very soil in which superstition most easily takes root?" asked Mathilde. "Besides," added she, "I, who knew your brother well, knew that with him it had always been so."

Mathilde looked sad, indeed, as she spoke. Old recollections of fruitless arguments, and vain endeavours to guide the credulous spirit to revelation instead of fancy, had crowded upon her heart.

At this juncture Christine broke in upon their conference, and Mathilde asked anxiously of her, "Have you found your son?"

"Ay; just on the point of starting though," answered Christine, with scarcely recovered breath; and then turning to Adrian, she exclaimed—

"See, sir! the way is plain enough at last,

and there is much to be done: for it wasn't only after the money that Mr. Claude came yesterday. No, no!" cried she, sitting down and rocking herself sadly to and fro; "he was after the treasure-seeking as well." Both Adrian and Mathilde uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Dear hearts," pursued Christine, "you perhaps never heard of it; but it is an old belief here, that all hidden treasures may be found in this town, and in all the country round, by him who looks for them while the priest is reading the Genealogy of the blessed Saviour at the midnight mass on Christmas-eve; and, depend upon it, it is that that Mr. Claude is after now; and it was about that that he came over yesterday, as well as the money. He was at twenty places during the day, making inquiries and obtaining particulars of how it was to be done. He wanted, too, to find some one, if he could, who had ever tried it; and folks sent him from one old body to another with all manner of tales, and without giving him much satisfaction at last. But even if there's nobody

alive who has found it to be true, everybody among the superstitious folk here believe it, just the same as if they had touched the treasure themselves. They told him, too, of many places in the neighbourhood where he might try. Every one was forward enough with advice; but they say he only laughed at them, and vowed that if he ever looked for treasure, he should take very good care to be sure it was there before he began!"

It was perplexing information enough. To Adrian it seemed quite probable that his brother's inquiries had been directed to no specific end, except that of making himself thoroughly acquainted with one of the many curious traditional beliefs of his native town. But Mathilde thought far otherwise. All the more so, perhaps, because it had come to her ears, from the agent's information to her father, that Claude had boasted to the former, that he should soon cease to be indebted to his mother's forced liberality for his comfort; had bantered him, also, on the slow Bonneval process of accumulation, and hinted that the prodigal son might

live to read them all a lesson on money-getting before he had done!

It was possible, certainly, that these bragging inuendos might have referred to Claude's proposed marriage with a lady of rank and fortune; but Mathilde deprecated so earnestly their making sure of this, that the little *côterie* decided upon taking some practical measures for discovering what Claude was really about, and whether he was indeed being inveigled into any act of mad folly by the unprincipled set with whom he had associated of late.

The wise forethought of Mathilde, in taking measures to secure, if possible, the services of Christine's son Zamet, was now warmly appreciated by Adrian, who knew his value well.

Zamet the younger was, in point of fact, the acute Maltese courier over again. Had the same keen eye and quick intelligence; the same vice-like determination of purpose; an equal aptitude for association with his fellows; and a considerably greater amount of scholarship.

Besides the nominal business of hair-cutting

in its various odd ramifications, for which he had opened a well-conducted establishment, he was himself employed, from time to time, confidentially, in various departments of business, where skill, trustworthiness, and secresy, were essential. Not unfrequently he travelled for some of the rich merchants of the place, who had some delicate matter in hand which required a keener eye and more tact than usual. And a vague belief also prevailed in Bonneval, although the fact had never been proved, that Zamet was a secret agent of the police of the place. The imperturbability, in spite of the good nature, with which Zamet met all inquiries, stultified everyone who thought to find him out ; and happily he had united himself to a Bonneval maiden, who, under a much more lively manner, proved as skilful in the art of mystification as himself.

Mathilde had, indeed, reason to rejoice that Christine had succeeded in finding her son at home on the present occasion ; for on a journey of secret investigation, who was so fit to be sent as Zamet Salviati ?

It was soon decided that he should proceed at once to Châteaudun, and occupy himself in discovering what Claude was about, and, if possible, what his new associate was about too ; for if implicated together in any plot, it was sure to be one in which the young man was to be the victim, and not the gainer. .

Zamet stood before Adrian while the orders were being given, upright, as if he had been a soldier all his life. The dark, steady eye turned first on one speaker, then on another, the mind evidently accompanying every glance ; and, like the firmly knit, compact little figure, apparently prepared to carry through resolutely whatever he might undertake. When everything was settled, Adrian, who was gazing with no small admiration at the little barber, and rather meditating on his character, observed—

“ And, of course, you will not let anyone suspect that you have been sent.”

Zamet gave one of his keen, steady glances at Adrian for a second ; but then his whole face relaxed into a smile, which few would have guessed him capable of wearing.

“ Monsieur !” said he, with a low, defe-

rential bow, half joke, half earnest, "I go to Châteaudun to-day in my peculiar capacity: hair-cutter — hair-dresser — dentist — anything you please. Letters of recommendation are scarcely necessary if I may be allowed to make use of the names of my friends."

Here he bowed once more, as if about to depart, but then hesitated for a moment, and said—

"I have but one apprehension. Will this young gentleman (bowing to Adrian) retain his patience till I either return or send word of what is to be done?"

Adrian rose from his chair and laughed. This plan, chiefly of Mathilde's devising, that Zamet should precede him to Châteaudun, was by no means to his taste, and he was not free from some secret intentions of following close on his ambassador's heels.

"The young gentleman's eye is restless," pursued Zamet; "but he might prevent the possibility of fathoming what is going on; were he to betray himself and openly ask. As a favour to Mlle. Mathilde, perhaps he will forbear, and await my news."

Zamet seemed to think this suggestion unanswerable, for he now made his bow of departure in reality ; joked at Christine's parting injunction to take care of himself ; first patted, and then kissed her on both cheeks ; and finally left his employers to their conjectures, and the patient awaital of his return.

Mathilde, carefully enveloped in cloaks and furs, was escorted home to her father's home by Adrian, who, leaving her there, proceeded to the Benedictine Monastery, where he had passed all the happier hours of his early life.

He dared not visit his mother ; and, under present circumstances, was glad to spare her the anxiety of vague information.

The town of Châteaudun, as seen afar off, is always an object of admiration and interest. Its ancient castle, situated on a hill, and rising above the rest of the buildings by which it is surrounded, is at once imposing and picturesque ; while river, woods, and landscape, seen through the translucent atmosphere peculiar to the place,

strike on the traveller's eye as he approaches, producing no common emotions of delight.

Zamet Salviati, as he trotted along the Bon-neval road on a pony hired for the occasion, had something else to think about, one would imagine, than pretty scenery; and he was, moreover, well acquainted with the place, for it was in Châteaudun he had served his apprenticeship to that profession of hair-dressing which he was pleased to boast of as his own.

Nevertheless, he slackened his pace for a few minutes when he came to that point of the road which brought the town into sight, and studied the scene for awhile, with apparently geographical accuracy; after which he resumed a more rapid pace, and, after half an hour's good riding, reached and passed the old-fashioned gates, and was presently lost in the winding mazes of the high, narrow streets.

Late on that same afternoon, a well-dressed and noble-looking young man was hastily crossing a square, in what may be considered the west-end quarter of Châteaudun, when he was met face to face by a stranger, who made him

so low a bow that it was almost impossible to pass by without noticing it.

The young man, whose attention was thus suddenly attracted, gave a slight start at first, then stared with some hauteur at the stranger ; but, not recognizing him, was about to move forward with a frown, when the stranger bowed again, more deeply even than before, and this time with a smile on his face, which claimed a recognition, at any rate on one side.

"I have no recollection,"—began the young man thus detained.

"Pardon, Monsieur," interrupted the stranger, with another bow, "it is not probable that you should be able to recal the humble hair-dresser of your native town. Nevertheless, Monsieur, you will forgive me for saying you yourself cannot be so easily forgotten !"

The profound air of deference, assumed by the stranger, seemed acceptable to the young man, for the frown which had previously overclouded his features relaxed slightly, and he said carelessly: "You are a Bonneval man, then? Ought I to remember you, I wonder?"

"The son of Christine Salviati," said Zamet, with another profound bow.

"Oh, of course, I recollect now!" was the rejoinder. "I was at your place often enough, but yourself I have not seen for years."

Here the young man, who was, in fact, Claude Genest, seemed determined to pass on; but old Christine's son, for he it was, was not to be parted with so easily.

"I was indeed so unfortunate more than once," persisted he, still maintaining his position in front of Claude; "but, by a happy accident, I am more favoured now. A happy accident, Monsieur, does more for a man sometimes than a lifetime of labour and waiting!"

Zamet bowed as he concluded this maxim, and then looked up with a smile to Claude, as if claiming assent.

Claude caught his keen eye for a moment, and then broke out into a loud unaccountable laugh.

"Monsieur will pardon me for informing him," remarked Zamet, in the blindest possible voice, "that I have been a great traveller since

the days when Monsieur resided at Bonneval ; and I have seen a great deal of life and art. Life and art are unknown in a town like mine," continued he, shrugging his shoulders in a sort of mock despair ; after which sentiment (which provoked another laugh from Claude) he added :

" Will Monsieur permit me, for once, at least, in my career, to exercise my skill in his behalf?"

Claude, half impatient, half amused, at his townsman's meek-mannered pertinacity, and a little piqued also by the character of his observations, gave a hasty consent, named the hour and pointed out the house (which indeed was in sight) where he had rooms ; and Zamet, with murmured expressions of the profoundest gratitude, bowed himself out of sight.

When Claude reached the door of his house, he did not go in, but passed it and walked forward. After turning down several streets in succession, he came to a very narrow and disreputable looking one, where his dress and appearance looked a good deal out of place.

He stopped, however, before a small, narrow

red brick building, which stood a little back from the rest. After waiting a few seconds, he was cautiously admitted through the half-opened door, into a low chamber, where a very ill-favoured, middle-aged man, sat surrounded by various huge books, and a vast display of quadrants, skulls, divining rods, crystals, and other necromantic paraphernalia.

As Claude stood in the dirty, low-roofed abode of dishonest pretence, it was a pity to behold him. So young, so handsome, so capable of better things, so comparatively, if only comparatively, innocent and honest,—what community had that bright, hope-surrounded youth with the merciless old pretender before him? What indeed, but that he had set up, for pursuit, as treasures of life, objects degrading to his nature and real requirements. Verily he was scratching on a dunghill for that which could never prove food. And all this that he might seem something he was not, obtain notoriety without honourable fame, and riches without respectable toil. In such a struggle the child of light had need to ask help of the son of darkness!

Claude and the astrologer, for a so-called astrologer he was, exchanged glances, and then Claude asked in a voice which made an effort to be resolute—

“To what conclusion have you come?”

The astrologer stretched his arm over the folio before him, and answered, with the solemnity due to his profession—

“My conclusions are independent of my will, they are, therefore, not liable to change from change of purpose.”

“Absolutely then,” exclaimed Claude, with uncontrollable impatience, “I will pay nothing till I see the treasure before me!”

“Absolutely, then, young man,” replied the astrologer, with contemptuous calmness, “you may find the treasure for yourself!” And, so saying, he affected to resume his perusal of the book.

Claude’s brow contracted, till the lines made deep furrows of shadow on his face. He hesitated, too, for several seconds, still standing opposite the table, for he was not asked to sit down. At length he turned abruptly away.

"Adieu, Signor Gentili!" said he.

"Au revoir, Monsieur Genest!" was the astrologer's unmoved rejoinder; and in a second or two after, Claude had left the house.

The astrologer knew his man, however, and had calculated justly. Before many minutes were over, the youth returned, and re-entered the room.

"You take advantage of my necessities!" was his first observation. "You know that I am in a strait—dare not recede, and cannot go on as I am. But we will have a compromise, Gentili! You shall accompany me to the treasure-vaults yourself; your plans confuse my head."

"I repeat to you, young man," cried the astrologer, stretching out the long fingers of his open hand to Claude with the palm exposed, "it is not in my power, even were we now in the treasure-vaults together, to give you the exact information you need, until you have made the sacrifice of a portion of your present trumpery wealth, to obtain the vast boon held out to you. What! do you suppose that a dis-

covery like that, which it has cost the learning of years to attain to, is to be laid hold of by you without a moment of labour or care, and without leaving to the discoverer any better-ensured reward than an empty promise? Preposterous idea!" concluded Gentili, affecting a just indignation.

Claude was evidently subdued.

"But we can compromise the matter, Gentili," he remarked. "You shall accompany me to the vaults. I will take with me the sum you demand, and as soon as ever you can point out to me, even at arms-length, the rock, in some part of which the treasure lies, I will pour the money into your other hand."

Gentili got up, and paced his narrow room in thought.

"The whole sum?" inquired he, sternly, stopping suddenly short, and facing Claude.

"The whole sum!" repeated Claude. "The last relics of a fortune, not my own; which I must replace by another, or die!"

A storm of distress seemed to be rising in the young man's breast as he spoke, but the astrologer only laughed.

“ If ingenuity of mind would build up fortunes, Monsieur Genest,” said he—“ and at times it will—you are destined to die a Croesus. It is written, perhaps. Well, be it so ! On those conditions I will accompany you to the vaults.”

“ It is settled, then, once for all ?” rejoined Claude, in an inquiring tone.

“ Once for all,” repeated the astrologer ; “ but there must be no Chapel-work if I am to be with you, remember ! ”

“ But how, then, are we to ascertain the time ? ” inquired Claude, impatiently ; for with a strange inconsistency of feeling he had resolved to attend, at any rate, the opening of the midnight mass on Christmas-eve, at one of the Churches.

“ It is settled ! ” said the astrologer, with that solemn importance he assumed now and then as part of his character, and the deluded Claude asked no more. But he was vexed, and disappointed, and exclaimed at last—

“ There is something then which you dare not face, Gentili !

“*Care* not, may be a better word than *dare* not, Mr. Genest!” sneered the astrologer, with indifference. “I will have no fellowship with mummeries, young man!”

The child of light shrank abashed before the strength of the son of darkness, and half envied the freedom of his soul!

The astrologer now showed symptoms of wishing to be alone, and the youth submitted with an almost mechanical deference, and departed.

Priest-ridden? Oh, no! Ridden by his own follies and vanity; by the cowardly weak-mindedness of a guilty heart; by the superstitious credulousness which almost invariably takes possession of the soul in which religious faith and moral practice are wanting.

Signor Gentili congratulated himself not a little, after Claude's departure, on the skill with which he had, as he thought, brought matters into a train for a favourable conclusion to himself; his sole object being to extract as much money from his young dupe as he possibly could, and then make an abrupt departure, and leave him to his fate.

He had already obtained sums of money from him, at various times, on one pretence or another, during an acquaintance — of which a slight sketch is necessary, in order to account for the influence he exercised over the unhappy young man at the present moment. But nothing that he had done before bore any comparison with what he was now attempting. Hitherto he had been contented with comparatively small gains; but on this occasion, which was necessarily to be the crowning act of this Châteaudun drama, he had raised his demands in proportion to his pretences, and flattered himself with the pleasing thought—if all went right—of leaving Châteaudun, a wealthy man!

Signor Gentili—alias, I know not how many other names and titles—was one of those professors of supernatural powers who were wont to adopt the very sagacious plan of travelling about, without any stationary home or fixed name.

The Signor Gentili—of high Italian descent,

but reduced circumstances—of Châteaudun, had flourished in Paris, perhaps, or in Vienna, during the previous year, as a totally different personage. He could be a gambler in one place, a simple-minded conjuror in another; and in all, secretly, for the *élite*, he was the “wise man” who could be referred to—under favour of rather exorbitant remuneration—for the explanation of mysteries, the discovery of lost goods and hidden treasures, and the foretelling of future events.

At Châteaudun, where he apprehended no open interference with these higher pretensions, he sat down for a time in his necromantic character—hinting, obscurely, at having become possessed of many of the secrets and valuable books of the celebrated Florent de Villiers, the Châteaudun astrologer; and, as the latter years of that worthy’s life had been spent in a distant town, no one could venture to dispute the statements Gentili made on the subject, or question the validity of the signature of de Villiers, accompanied by cabalistic signs, which he occasionally displayed to a favoured few, on

the fly-leaves of some of his oldest and most imposing-looking books.

“ He who will gain his point, and has but a tongue, will gain it assuredly ;” and so it proved with Signor Gentili. What he gave himself out for, people believed him to be ; and it was even reported that fair and beautiful women had been seen soiling their delicate feet on the stones of his dirty street, to gain a clue to their fate in life, or learn, beforehand, the issue of some passionate love.

With such a reputation as he soon obtained, it was no wonder that Claude Genest, in dislike and despair of all honourable means of furnishing the wherewithal to continue his extravagant and assumptive mode of life, eagerly sought him out ; hoping, through such a man, in some indefinite way, to make that short cut to fame and fortune which would, as he thought, ensure his happiness for ever.

And the astrologer, on his part, had seldom found a more favourable subject on whom to practise his arts.

Men of his description usually become keen

observers of human nature; and, constantly on the look out for weak points of character, are not slow in discovering them.

Claude's vanity, weak credulousness, and want of steady principle, were salient points, which no one could fail to observe; and the astrologer made the most of them, working carefully upon all.

He discovered that young Genest, about whose family he took care to make inquiries, was very desirous of dismissing the Bonneval merchant-connection from his thoughts as much as possible, and of dwelling on the family descent which he inherited from his mother.

Among some of those maternal ancestors of whom he was wont to talk, was one Robert of Blois, a man who, in his day, had acquired a sufficient amount of notoriety to be chronicled in the pages of history. He had been the twelfth Abbot of Marmoutier, and had been permitted by the Pope to wear a mitre; but by far the most striking points of his history, according to old records, were his excessive personal beauty, and his skill in accumulating riches for the benefit of the monastery.

Of the old Abbot's beauty Claude did consider himself a fair representative, and he only wished he might be able one day to follow in his steps in that other characteristic point—his skill in heaping up the good things of this world.

No sooner had Gentili heard this favourite tale of the rich Robert of Blois from his young descendant, than he built up his plans accordingly; and, affecting to be much struck with the coincidences of similarity between the two, hinted that he had good reason for supposing there was a hidden meaning in the fact; requested to be allowed to draw out the scheme of Claude's nativity, and to forecast the events he suspected were yet in store for him.

The young man consented with tremulous eagerness; and, having furnished the necessary particulars, awaited the issue of the astrologer's cogitations and calculations, with an anxiety which it would be difficult to describe.

The result came, at last, in a very unexpected manner. Late one evening, a few months before my story opens, Signor Gentili honoured Claude Genest by a visit at his house.

He appeared greatly perturbed in mind, and expressed, in broken sentences, his uncertainty as to whether Claude would have the strength of nerve to avail himself of the good fortune now so evidently within his reach; and, after a preamble, which worked up the young man's curiosity, anxiety, and hope, to an almost insupportable pitch, he proceeded to inform him that, in the first place, so far from Robert de Blois having accumulated riches solely for the benefit of the monastery, he had both inherited and amassed together vast sums of money of which the monks of Marmoutier knew nothing whatever. His influence among the great and rich had been immense. The doors of the powerful are seldom closed, Gentili hinted, against the claims of a prepossessing appearance, and high descent; and the odour of sanctity which his high office threw around him gave a power into his hands which he had not failed to use.

It was at one time his intention—Gentili could prove, he said—to obtain a dispensation to quit the religious life, and resume his position in the world, as a man of fortune and con-

dition; with which view he had secreted, in various parts of the country, huge sums of money, of which to possess himself when the opportunity for using them arose.

Had Claude been very susceptible on the subject of his ancestor's reputation, he would not have very much liked this account of Robert de Blois. But he was wonderfully indifferent to everything but what related to himself.

To corroborate his statement, Gentili produced a well-worn missal, which had come into his possession, he said, at the time when he had purchased a portion of the library of Florent de Villiers; and on the fly-leaf of which was to be seen, in faded characters, the signature of Robert de Blois. Below the signature was some secret writing, which the astrologer assured Claude it had cost him weeks to decipher, but of which he had at last discovered the key. This he produced, and Claude read the writing for himself, which was to the following effect:—

“ In case of a dispensation for family rea-

sons, and for returning into the world as head of an illustrious race ;” and then followed the names of certain places in which hoards of treasures were secreted, and among them stood “Châteaudun vaults, under the garden ;” after which were placed the figures of a sum of money, so vast and unexpected, that Claude started up from his chair as if struck by an electric shock.

Gentili laid his hand on his arm, and chid him bitterly for his childish impetuosity ; and the humbled victim sat down to listen once more. “The lord of the second house fortunately placed in the ascendant” (as the astrologer worded it), in Claude’s own horoscope, clearly foretold that he was to “attain great riches without much labour, in a manner unexpectedly ;” while a horary question, drawn up for the date of the Abbot’s death, and asking what was to become of his accumulated riches, showed that a great portion of them was destined to fall into the hands of a collateral descendant of his family ; that no one else could succeed in obtaining them ; but that *he* should

be raised through them to an eminence little short of that of the Abbot himself.

Claude's brain went round with excitement as he listened, and looked, and tried to examine for himself the proofs, writings, books, and astrological figures, which Gentili laid in abundance before him.

"Judge for yourself," was his incessant cry, laying his hand on the two astrological schemes, and explaining their bearings on the subject, in the jargon of the science, till Claude's confusion was complete.

The old missal was the only thing he felt clearly to comprehend, and on that he fastened with avidity; purchased it from his friend at a heavy price, and paid him scarcely less handsomely for his scientific labours.

And even now the mighty business was but just begun. Satisfied, as Gentili affected to be, that Claude was that descendant of Robert de Blois who was to become possessed of his hoarded riches, the spot of concealment remained still to be ascertained, and the question had to be asked as to the propitious moment for the search.

But, according to Gentili, the resources of his art were inexhaustible; and there seemed, indeed, every appearance of their being so, as long as Claude could supply the worldly means necessary for propitiating the stars.

As to the spot of concealment, after several long and unnecessary rambles about Château-dun to look for "vaults under a garden," Gentili had one day an inspiration that what was meant was "The Gulf,"—the subterranean cavern which was visible through a chasm in the grounds of the Franciscan Monastery, and which was known to extend for at least a quarter of a mile under the town.

The entrance to this singular natural excavation was over some rocks by the river, at a spot by no means difficult of access, near the outskirts of the town; and Claude and the astrologer having visited it together by daylight, came to the conclusion that no doubt could be entertained on the subject of its being the spot indicated by Robert de Blois; after which nothing remained but for the necromancer to exercise his art as treasure-finder, question the stars for

a favourable moment for the search, and point out, in the wild accumulation of rock, the precise spot where the treasure lay.

To effect such portentous results, Signor Gentili shut himself up, and refused to see Claude under any pretence whatever. He must work out the difficulties alone !

When he announced himself as prepared, and Claude, who had lived meanwhile in a fever of excitement and uncertainty, was permitted to visit him again, he stated, with the most solemn effrontery, that he had obtained a plan of the cavern, and was prepared to point out the rock in which an opening had been made to receive the treasure, and which had since been filled up by a stone, which a very slight exertion would remove ; but the precise position of which he was not permitted to know until the sacrifice had been made, by a descendant of Robert de Blois, of a very large sum of actual money, in return for the prize held out. Claude fell from ecstasy to despair. He had not the money to give for that or any other purpose just then. His drains on the family fund, often renewed as they were,

only produced cash in detail. The huge amount which the necromancer demanded it would be impossible to obtain.

But Signor Gentili was inexorable, nay fierce, now he had enclosed his victim in his toils. He taunted Claude with irresolute baseness, with living under false appearances of wealth, when in reality he had the spirit of a beggar in his heart. In a fine outburst of wrath he declared, that *he* assuredly was not the descendant of Robert de Blois who was destined to realize the treasures he had left. Had he no brother of nobler heart than himself, who would come forward and be willing to earn the prize? The astrologer had made sufficient inquiries, privately, to be aware that this suggestion was a home-thrust of the bitterest character, and Claude crouched beneath the blow.

He then enlarged, with eloquent pathos, on his own labours, mental and bodily, to obtain the knowledge for which Claude so meanly grudged the just remuneration; contrasted his own life of strained nerves, and spiritual visitation, with the idle follies of dissipation in which

Claude wasted hour after hour, and day after day ; twitted him, mockingly, with the folly of his aspiring after the hand of the lovely daughter of the Viscount Delaroche, when he had not a sixpence to settle on his bride !

In short, by the time Gentili had exhausted invectives, the miserable Claude succumbed. He, who had tyrannized over mother, brother, and friends, and was prepared to do so yet, bent down his neck to the yoke of an insolent deceiver, and allowed himself to be trampled upon, and persuaded to add wrong to wrong.

On the following morning he made his cruel expedition to Bonneval : that expedition during which, partly by entreaties, partly by menaces, he persuaded his mother to give her authority for his drawing out the unreasonable sum the astrologer demanded, from the fast diminishing fortunes of the house. But, coldly selfish as he appeared altogether to others, and was practically, he did not carry through that last unprincipled transaction without the most cutting upbraidings of conscience, and even personal suffering.

And strangely enough, it happened that a word dropped in derision from his mother in her despair, to the effect that *he had better repair his fortune by seeking for treasures on Christmas-eve*, recalled to his mind the old Bonneval legend, which he, (at all times a lover of the marvellous,) had been well acquainted with in his youth. Hence had arisen the feverish inquiries he had made in Bonneval, of which Christine had heard a far from exaggerated account: and as he rode back to Châteaudun, in the evening, the idea crossed his mind that, by the aid of that legend, he perhaps should be able to dispense with the services of the astrologer altogether, and restore at once to his mother the ruinous sum he had forced from her hands.

It was not a grateful feeling that prompted this notion; but Claude had not been in the habit of being grateful. The fact was, that the scene in which he had played so evil a part at Bonneval had roused up his long slumbering compunctions into a more active state than usual; the sight of the old place, too, recalled

gentler thoughts than he had dared to indulge in since he had left it to make his fortune in Châteaudun; and a strange, unlooked-for wish arose several times to his mind, that he could throw the astrologer, Châteaudun, his new social position, even Viscount Delaroche's lovely daughter (whom he was courting assiduously, and not unsuccessfully, in the character of a man of fortune), overboard, and return to the place and the life he had so much despised: to that mother whom he had so much insulted and injured: and to that brother whom he had driven from his home, but whom he now felt that he would go the world over to find, and restore to his proper place! Of Mathilde he dared not to think at all.

But in the gloom and solitude of his chamber that night, after spending a few distracted hours at a gay ball, all the miserable weakness, consequent upon his leading a thoroughly unsatisfactory life, returned upon him as strongly as ever. How, during the brief period indicated by the legend, should he ever find time to traverse, alone and unaided, those vaults from

end to end, and so come upon the one precise spot where the presence of the treasure would be made irresistibly known ?

No ! whether he liked it or not, he must take the astrologer into his counsels ; for his enslaved mind had lost the spirit of self-reliance, and courage is for the morally strong. Claude was weak ; and, had he owned the truth to himself, durst not have ventured into those vaults alone at midnight, for the treasures of a hundred Roberts de Blois !

He sought Gentili out, therefore, as usual ; but the two men were playing a game one against the other now, whether they knew it or not. Claude had purchased the sum of money at too severe a cost to part with it lightly ; and rejected at once all notion of paying it away before he had found its substitute in the vaults ; while, on the other hand, Gentili's original intention had, of course, been to quit the place at once, on the receipt of the money, long before Claude could return from his midnight expedition, to upbraid him with its want of success.

It was difficult to reconcile these very con-

tradictory views; but the schemers came to a compromise at last, as has been told. Gentili agreed to accompany Claude to the vaults, on condition that, as soon as he could point out the treasure-rock as in sight, the purchase-money of the supernatural discovery of the precise spot where it lay was to be put into his hand.

Very unwillingly, it must be owned, had he yielded to a plan which involved him in so much more trouble and risk than the payment beforehand would have done; and never had he disliked the young fool, his victim, so thoroughly, as when he found him so unexpectedly obstinate. But there was no remedy. He wanted the money, and must run some risk to obtain it; and then, once in the vaults and with Claude's money in his pocket, he must trust to the chapter of accidents as to how he should get away. Not that he intended to trust to the chapter of accidents only. He had matched himself mentally against Claude upon the subject of strength and activity of body, at the moment when he was consenting to the

obnoxious arrangements; and, if he did not feel sufficiently satisfied on the subject of personal prowess, it was easy enough to add a dagger to the implements with which he would naturally provide himself in his character of treasure-seeker.

Claude, meanwhile, who, after his visit to Bonneval, had insisted on the experiment being made on the night of Christmas-eve, felt himself less beholden to the astrologer than he had been before he had remembered the legend; and, with the feeling of needing him less, there arose in his mind emotions of distrust which he scarcely acknowledged even to himself, but which alone could account for his determined pertinacity in refusing the payment of the money, and for the care with which he, too, added weapons of defence to the tools which he had prepared for his visit to the vaults.

Such were the secret feelings towards each other of these two nominal friends; and such the preparations which they made for their treasure-seeking together in the vaults of Châteaudun!

Claude, however, finished his evening in a scene which served to divert his thoughts entirely from such disagreeable subjects. In the brilliant saloons of the Viscount Delaroche's house, which were opened that night to a large and gay assembly, he was little likely to be thinking of his poverty, his future prospects, or of a low astrologer. Verily he had acted the young man of fortune and pretension so long, that, when he was well got up for the occasion, he almost believed himself to be what he pretended.

And his appearance that night was no less attractive than usual. Nay, Zamet's skill in hairdressing, to which the young man had resigned himself for a lounging half hour, much to his own amusement, had produced a decidedly piquant effect.

Oh, those scenes of life, where everything is so unreal, so superficial, and so unsatisfactory! where there is so much acting, without the amusement of the stage; and so much labour, without any of the results of toil:—what madness must seize upon the mind be-

fore a reasonable being can crave after such contemptible excitement, as if it were one of the deepest enjoyments of life !

Meanwhile, the astrologer, unrobed and reduced to a mere mortal man, both in body and spirit, packed up the greater part of his far from extensive belongings, and then sat down to meditate, not without some anxiety, as to the possible issue of the treasure-seeking on the morrow.

The third person of the Châteaudun drama was decidedly the best satisfied of the three. Zamet, as he emerged into the street, after his interview with Claude, was conscious of having made the most of his opportunity and time.

It was past eleven o'clock at night, and still no intelligence had reached Bonneval of Zamet or his proceedings ; and Adrian and Christine sat almost silently over her hearth, secretly wondering whether it would not be wiser to give up further expectation for the night, and trust to the morrow for news or Zamet's appearance.

But while they were thus thinking, a noise was heard outside the house, and a knocking at the door at last announced an arrival.

The man who now entered was a stranger from Châteaudun, and had had some difficulty, on reaching Bonneval, in making out the abode of the old nurse. He brought a letter from Zamet to Adrian, and one to Christine, which charged her to provide him with some sort of accommodation for the night.

The letter was pithy enough, and seemed to the anxious Adrian to give more orders than information. It announced that he had satisfied himself of there being a plot for the following night, which must be counter-plotted with determination; that a half hour he had spent with Claude had convinced him that that young gentleman, as he called him, was at once duped and distrustful; and he (Zamet) made it his urgent entreaty that Adrian, the Benedictine Monk, the Notary, and—if he might be permitted to suggest as much for Mr. Claude's sake—Mademoiselle Mathilde, also, should repair to Châteaudun on the following day.

The messenger would direct them, Zamet proceeded to say, to the inn facing the river, where he would be in readiness to receive them about noon.

Adrian turned the letter over many times, as people are wont to do, who would fain, if possible, extract a something, by gazing, out of the insensible paper before them. But it was in vain:—there was a plot; but of what sort, or what extent of danger, they must wait till to-morrow to know.

Adrian and Christine looked at each other; but neither could devise or divine anything beyond the simple statement.

“One thing I do know,” said the old woman, at last, “and it’s a great comfort, Mr. Adrian. You may trust Zamet as if he was yourself.”

“A great deal more confidently!” answered Adrian, good-naturedly. “An anxious heart has seldom a cool head.”

When Adrian repaired to the notary’s house the next morning, he had some misgivings as to whether M. de Tessier would fall into Zamet’s singular plan, that he and Mlle. Mathilde should

proceed at once to Châteaudun. But the old gentleman consented at once, and with a ready alacrity which surprised them all. So, in due time, and after suitable preparations had been made, the little party found themselves on the road which Zamet had traversed the day before.

The notary furnished both a horse and mule for the occasion, and busied himself in procuring from a neighbour a suitable steed for Adrian; the accomplishment of which feat seemed to afford him unqualified satisfaction.

In fact, it was evident that M. de Tessier entered upon the day's work before them with the keenest relish; and many an anxious moment was spared the young folks, as they journeyed onward, by his opening out into conversation, and beguiling their thoughts with strange stories of his own youth and adventures.

He told of disappointed ambition, and out-manceuvred schemes; admitting, with infinite naiveté, that he had committed one blunder on the top of another all through life, whenever he attempted to do anything startlingly advantageous to his fortunes and position.

“Whenever I thought to be particularly worldly-wise, my friend,” remarked he to Adrian, “I was baffled by rogues who were more worldly-wise still, and had not, as I always had, to a certain extent, *scruples*. There is no compromising in life between right and wrong, I am satisfied now,” added he; “a man who is led astray to a certain amount of wrong, but yet has scruples about the how much, has no success in either this world or the next. It is not fair that he should have. The man of principle, who refuses to do wrong at all, and the man of no scruples, who will do anything to gain his object, are the only ones who have a right to succeed. Own, young man, that I am correct.”

Adrian did, indeed, give his assent; but the conversation would soon have flagged, had not the notary resumed it.

“Your brother Claude, Monsieur, is a man of scruples, and can never succeed in the road of wrong any more than myself. He thinks to make a compromise,—so did I,—but we must wake him out of the delusion.”

Interested as Adrian was, it was difficult to reply to such remarks; but he ventured at last to ask the notary what had been his opinion of Claude's character, when he was his pupil.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old man, "that is a tender point, indeed! Mathilde knows—Mathilde, you will bear me witness how often, for the last few years, I have regretted the profitless intercourse betwixt myself and Claude Genest. As for his scholarly attainments, that was all well enough; but I could not be troubled with his wilfulness. I ought to have corrected his follies and guided his mind, but I was satisfied with cramming his head; for the other, sooth to say, seemed a Herculean task. Monsieur, in my conduct in this matter I added another blunder to the heaped-up blunders of my life. When the results became manifest, I would have retraced my steps if possible; but the young man was beyond pupilage then, and resented my interference! I have much to reproach myself with. I hoped once, indeed, that my daughter's influence was destined to accomplish what I had left undone; but there,

also, I have been doomed to disappointment. Now another hope dawns on me, namely, that if I can help to save the lad in a crisis of danger from the hands of rogues, I may be able at last to insinuate my philosophy into his heart! And another thing!" pursued the notary, looking round with almost youthful ardour at them all; "I have been baffled by rogues all my life, my friends! and if I can aid in baffling a rogue to-night, it will shed such a lustre over my broken fortunes, as will light up my already contented old age with a gleam of actual delight."

In the energy of the thought, the notary spurred forward his horse to a quicker pace, and said no more till the little party stopped, as travellers so often do, at that turn of the road which brought the beautiful town of Châteaudun first into sight.

Zamet, meanwhile, was waiting to receive his friends on their arrival at the inn, and, rather to their surprise, met them with a face absolutely radiant with satisfaction. He ushered them gaily into their temporary abode, introduced

them to the notice of the landlord, and subsequently escorted them himself to the rooms which he had arranged for their accommodation, and where every comfort which the place afforded was provided for the notary's fair daughter.

As a matter of course, every one expressed gratification, although the thing seemed too trifling to be worth such a display of interest. But when the exhibition was over, and the landlord had bowed himself away, Zamet gently closed the door, and, standing with his back to it, remarked, with that very bright smile upon his face which it occasionally wore—

“ My information is now complete, gentlemen! Within the last two hours I have been so fortunate as to discover the very spot which Mr. Claude and the astrologer are to visit to-night, and—as my mother anticipated—at a moment when they ought to be engaged in saying their prayers. Pardon, gentlemen! I am smiling to think there will be more visitors to the magical spot than those two treasure-seekers expect! With deference to you, gen-

tlemen," added Zamet, with a bow, "such is my plan: that we surprise them, and see fair play done between man and man."

There was something so cheering in Zamet's tone, that it seemed to dispel the anxious feelings of even Adrian and Mathilde. As for the notary, he rubbed his hands with satisfaction, and became more excited with delight than ever; made Zamet sit down with them, and took the most prominent part in inquiring into the proposed operations of the night, clapping the little Maltese, from time to time, on the back, in token of energetic approbation of his views.

The one point which, until that morning, Zamet had not been able to clear up, was *where* the treasure-seeking was to take place; and although he was prepared for the troublesome office of watching and following, when the time came, it was an inconvenient plan, and he resolved to make a last effort to get at more complete information. Accordingly, he called at an early hour that morning at Claude's lodgings, professed an anxious wish for a brief

interview with Monsieur before he returned to Bonneval, and was finally admitted to the young man's presence, who submitted himself again to Zamet's professional skill, heartily glad of the half hour's diversion afforded him by the piquant conversation of the odd little barber. "I became now," said Zamet, (describing the scene to his friends at the inn,) "very great and enthusiastic on the beauties and wonders of Châteaudun; professed to have become enchanted with the place, and to have thoughts of settling there: asked Monsieur if he had yet visited the magical fountain of Les Jalans, or strolled along the banks of La Conie, the overflow of whose waters presaged war, pestilence, or famine; and expressed amazement at his indifference on subjects of such deep and perplexing importance. Monsieur defended himself warmly then; and in the most energetic manner asserted an interest far exceeding my own. Gentlemen," continued Zamet, "I tried him on every point I could think of—and I thought I knew the place pretty well; I named several ruined buildings

in the neighbourhood ; also several of the most ancient monasteries of the town ; for it is chiefly about such places as those there are reports of treasures being hidden : but nothing seemed to touch him particularly till I asked him if he had been into the garden of the Franciscan monks, and looked down into ‘ The Gulf,’ as it is called, which runs under one side of the town. Then, gentlemen, I felt him absolutely start under my hands, but he did not at first speak.

“ ‘ Ah, Monsieur!’ cried I, ‘ that is a place, indeed ! To me it looks like the pit of hell itself !’

“ ‘ What nonsense for a man like you to talk !’ exclaimed Mr. Claude, at once ; and almost angry, as I thought. ‘ What is it but a subterranean vault ? There are plenty of others like it, no doubt. Any place looks dark when you look down at it from a height :—that is all.’

“ ‘ Doubtless, Monsieur, it is nothing else, as you justly remark ; but the appearance from above, which creates that odd sensation,’ cried I ; ‘ seen from below, by those walking in it, it

would doubtless appear common-place enough, like any other vault of similar character.'

" 'Not so common-place, perhaps,' remarked Mr. Claude, between his teeth; but I doubted if the observation was meant for my ear.

" 'A wonderful natural curiosity, indeed!' I went on, as if I had been meditating all the time.

" 'Indeed!' exclaimed Mr. Claude, very eagerly, and turning round so as to observe my face. But he saw nothing but a blank look, of which he could make nothing.

" 'Undoubtedly, Monsieur,' was my calm reply. 'Every one knows that, who knows anything of Châteaudun.'

" 'Knows *what*?' asked Mr. Claude, with so wild an eagerness, I was cut to the heart to think of his misguided folly; but I put on a smile to reassure him.

" 'Pardon, Monsieur!' cried I. 'I thought everyone knew it was the outlet for the waters of the river in times of threatened inundation.' Mr. Claude's countenance fell from its excitement in an instant, and he turned away with

an almost impatient—‘oh!’ after which, I found I could command his attention no longer. Yet, before we parted, he commented on the severity of the frost, and remarked, with a laugh, that The Gulf was not of much use to anybody in such a weather as the present.

“Now then, gentlemen,” pursued Zamet, “I had little doubt that it was in the vaults of Châteaudun the treasure was to be sought; but, to assure myself of the fact, I afterwards called, in the character of a country lad, on the astrologer—of whose friendship with Mr. Claude you were, Monsieur de Tessier, rightly informed.

“I gave myself out as a young man wanting a little money to marry upon, and professed myself determined to try the country legend of treasure-seeking during midnight mass on Christmas-eve.

“The astrologer eyed me very suspiciously at first; but my stupid, unintelligent manner soon undeceived him. I said, ‘I will pay you what I can to tell me where to go to.’ Here I held out some money, which the rascal took as unscrupulously as if he could have looked through

fate! 'Shall I go to so and so?' said I, naming a lonely ruin a quarter of a mile off, 'or to The Gulf? There must be plenty of treasure in The Gulf, I should think; it's such a secret place.'

" 'No more treasure there than in your own head,' was the astrologer's polite reply, in a fever, as it seemed, of wrath. 'You may as well deliver yourself over to the Evil One at once,' cried he, 'as go there during midnight mass. At your peril go near it, young fool. Remember!' He then affected to perform certain signs, and examine the pages of his book; after which he wrote something on paper, and presented it to me. I stared at it, and shook my head. He snatched the paper impatiently from me, and then gave me verbal instructions as to the exact spot in the lonely ruin, where I should find what I sought. I listened, open-mouthed, and bowed with gratitude at the conclusion, grinning at him with mock delight.

"As I was withdrawing, after making my countryfied bow, I caught one more furtive

glance of suspicion in the corner of his eye. Pretending to check myself at the door, therefore, I came back to him, and, with a loutish bow and smile, assured him that if I succeeded I would bring him back another sum of money equal to that which I had just paid. I think this folly quite satisfied him, for he now waved me away without betraying any further doubt."

There was a pause after Zamet had concluded. Mathilde was the first to break it.

"Does the frost continue, Zamet?" inquired she.

"For the present, yes," was Zamet's reply.

The rest of the party began at once to discuss the proceedings in prospect. The chief opening to the subterranean vault lay, as Zamet told them, not above a quarter of a mile from where they were.

It was called the river-entrance to The Gulf, and consisted, for a certain way, of a rocky plateau, level with the bank of the river-side. After a couple of hundred yards or so, however, this plateau ended altogether, and a confused mass of rocks, like the broken wall of a cascade,

led down from it to the depths of a cavern, which, even when viewed thus near, had a most terrific and gloomy appearance.

Here it was, indeed, that the river Loir, when accidentally swollen, turned aside, and poured in its mass of superfluous waters, where none could be injured by their flow. But, although Zamet was aware of this general fact, from having, during his apprenticeship in Châteaudun in his youth, become generally well acquainted with the place, even he was scarcely alive to all the merits or dangers of The Gulf.

It was only in those cases—rare enough, it is true, but still from time to time occurring—in which some sudden change in the weather, such as very violent rains in the hills, or rapid thaws, brought the river down, breast-high, at once to the valley, (as occurs occasionally with our own north-country streams,) that the protection afforded to the town by that vault could be fully appreciated.

Then it was that in its gloomy bosom, in the midst of a silence quite profound, a sudden tumult, as of thunder, would be heard; then it

was that the mute, subterranean caverns echoed madly to the crash of a waterfall, formed by the impetuous course of the swollen torrent over that broken wall of rock. A roar which never ceased, until The Gulf, filled up to the level of the river itself, looked like another branch of its waters, rather than a temporary outlet for its abundance.

To this entrance, at all common seasons, the access, although scrambling in character, was easy enough; and here it was, of course, that the astrologer and Claude proposed entering the mysterious receptacle; for the only other opening to it was that afforded by the yawning chasm in the garden of the Franciscan monks, where a rope and basket were the sole means by which the vault itself could be reached.

To wait for the midnight hour, and then follow in the footsteps of the astrologer and Claude to their destination, was, of course, the plot of the evening; for that the whole of this pretended treasure-seeking was a nefarious scheme, on the part of the former, to extract money from the deluded youth, no one could

doubt; though exactly how his plans were laid, it was impossible to detect.

To pursue him, therefore, and watch the issue of the affair; prevent villany if attempted, and expose roguery if possible, thereby rescuing Claude from his present state of blind delusion, was the object which the little band of conspirators had at heart; and, in the meantime, after deciding on the general plan of operations, Zamet busied himself in procuring refreshments, while the notary and Adrian strolled out to examine the entrance of The Gulf.

Immediately after their departure, Mathilde summoned the active little Maltese to her side.

"Zamet," said she, "I do not wish unnecessarily to alarm Mr. Adrian, nor indeed, for my own sake, to forecast improbable evils; but in all your schemes for to-night, there is one event, I fear, you are not provided against!" Mathilde's face was deadly pale as she spoke.

"And that is, Mademoiselle?" inquired he.

"The river, Zamet;—if a sudden change in the weather should occur," replied Mathilde; but she spoke with difficulty, for she hardly

liked to admit to her own mind the possibility of the terrible danger which, in the course of Zamet's conversation, had occurred to her.

“There is no appearance of any alteration in the weather, Mademoiselle,” answered Zamet, with grave composure. “Nevertheless, it is a poor wisdom that does not provide against all accidents. Moreover, Mademoiselle, as it is you who have named the subject, let me tell you all. I myself have fancied, once or twice to-day, an altered sound in the wind, and hence have been induced to make some other inquiries, besides those connected with the treasure-seeking. Our landlord has a strong boat at our service, which can bear any amount of hard usage, and although all entry by such means into the vault is out of the question until the water has risen to the level of the river, it would be then possible, though at some little risk I own, to push off the boat into the deep stream, when it would go readily enough along the vaults.”

“And the return, Zamet?” mused Mathilde, anxiously.

"Could not be managed, Mademoiselle, against the torrent; but I should depend on other means for escape."

Mathilde was too much confused to conjecture how.

"A party of friends, stationed by the chasm in the garden of the Franciscan monks, could contrive the rescue by a basket and ropes, Mademoiselle, should it be necessary; but this is providing beforehand indeed! Yet Mr. Adrian's friend, the Benedictine monk: I hoped he would have accompanied you here."

"He is still expected," was Mathilde's reply.

"He would be the very person to conduct that part of the business, in case of such an emergency," observed Zamet. "But you are satisfied, are you not, Mademoiselle, that even this improbable event is, in a manner, provided against?"

"I am," replied the poor girl; almost shuddering to find that the evil had been contemplated as possible by others.

"It was for your sake only, Mademoiselle," pursued Zamet, "that I made no mention of

this part of my preparations. I wished to spare you unnecessary anxiety."

"It was kindly meant," replied Mathilde; "and now remember, Zamet! should *that* happen, I go with you in the boat!" Zamet's face betokened some strong forthcoming expostulation, but Mathilde stretched out her hand with a gesture commanding silence. "I will hear no objections," said she, firmly, "so make none. I will hope with you that we may not be tried, but, *if we are*, I must be among those who go to save him!"

There was a determination in her tone, which Zamet respected too much to oppose. He bowed profoundly, and, resuming his previous occupations, left the devoted Mathilde to the communings of her own heart.

Ere long, however, the arrival of the Benedictine monk, Father Ulric, roused her from her somewhat painful reverie.

To this old friend of the Genests, and indeed of her own family also, she confided at once her fears and determination; and, to her unutterable delight, Father Ulric confirmed her in

her views, instead of opposing them with arguments of prudence and reason.

"There are seasons in life, daughter," he said, "in which all the common rules of life fail; seasons in which all the usages, and forms, and conventionalities must be thrown aside, as matters of the supremest indifference. The struggle here is to rescue a deluded man from perils, both of body and soul. I am not willing to underrate the influence which your sudden and unexpected appearance, in such a place, at such a moment, may have upon such a misguided, rather than naturally depraved, mind. I am, perhaps, more inclined to overjudge its probable effects than you yourself may be; but, whatever may be the result, you, secure in the purity of your intentions, can have nothing to regret!"

Mathilde knelt at the feet of the monk, praying in tears for a blessing on those intentions, inasmuch as they were unsullied by a single feeling which could make them unacceptable in the sight of Him who alone can judge the heart. The return of the explorers soon followed.

They had found the entrance exactly as Zamet had described it, and the notary's spirit of adventure had by this time so infected Adrian, that the whole party sat down to their afternoon meal with a cheerfulness which their adventure seemed at one time very unlikely to permit. Mathilde then retired to rest for awhile, to prepare herself for the toils of the night; while Adrian, Father Ulric, the notary, and Zamet discussed the minor points of consideration, secured flambeaux and weapons, and talked over the fatal, though remote, possibility of a rising of the river; and, by the aid of the man whom Zamet had previously employed as messenger, and who was a servant about the inn, every precaution was taken, and every possible want forestalled.

The Benedictine monk was not to accompany them into the vaults, but to remain near the entrance with the servant in question, so as to be prepared against that fearful contingency, by which Mathilde's mind seemed haunted.

And thus they planned wisely and well enough, for creatures who could not foresee the

future, and then sat down to await with calm composure the time of action. Whoever had looked into that little room that night, and seen those four men, sitting silently together, each one absorbed in his own particular thoughts, would have wondered what solemn expectation was hanging over them.

That they were anticipating something there could be no doubt, for from time to time a glance was cast at the hands of a watch which was laid upon the table with its face upwards.

At last the Benedictine monk, after looking at it, rose suddenly, and said: "My children, let us pray!" And all knelt down while he, who had been the friend of Jean du Temps' children, and was imbued with some of those enlightened views which, at a few periods of French history, insinuated themselves into the hearts even of those who continued their allegiance to the Romish Church, offered up a brief, earnest prayer in their common tongue, for a blessing on the undertaking before them.

If beautiful music, magnificent architecture, splendid decorations, and the faultless carrying out of ceremonial worship, could do much towards making a man pious, keeping him holy, or preserving him from sin, what saints the Popes of Rome would have been !

After this remark, I shall not be misunderstood when I say, that the service of the midnight mass on the Vigil of the Nativity, as carried out by the Church of Rome, is, in some respects, one of the most imposing and effective of religious ceremonies.

Those who have honestly asked themselves what the utmost perfection of gorgeous ritual and pageantry has accomplished in the spot where it has reigned supreme for centuries, and as honestly answered the question from the pages of history, cannot be suspected of that fatal mistake of expecting more from externals than externals have ever had power to effect.

Measured at their right value, they are, indeed, soothing and refreshing accessories to devotion; but (happily for us, if we trust too much to them) while we are seeking to impress

the heart by turning our very confession of sin into a melody, and elevating penitence itself into a graceful and attractive act, God takes us into His own hands, and leads us by a very different road to Himself! Carries us up by His Spirit into the wilderness of some bitter grief; brings us face to face with the diseases that infest the hovel; desolates us by that death which reduces kings and beggars to one level; makes us for once, in our vain, contemptible lives, forget or disregard appearances altogether; and forces us, by the reality of a misery which has penetrated marrow and bones, to cry aloud in earnest (no matter in what language, or how unmusically) for that grace which alone can convert the soul.

Assuredly, I cannot be misunderstood now, when I repeat that the service of the midnight mass on Christmas-eve is a most impressive spectacle. The solemn hour at which it is held—the torch-light—the procession of richly-clad priests—the rolling magnificence of the music—the wafted incense—the congregation bursting forth into the noble hymn “Adeste fideles”

—coupled with the thought of what it is that is thus commemorated—render those hours the most interesting, perhaps, in the whole year.

Shutting our eyes resolutely to any painted image of the lowly Mother of our Lord, decked out in fine silk dresses and earthly jewels, as also to the little doll-like Christ-child, so evidently fresh from the toy-shop, and looking so silly in its bed of artificial flowers, we can with pleasure give ourselves up to the devotional emotions produced by rites otherwise so well carried out, and made so delightful by the attractions of sights and sounds.

In an obscure corner of the royal abbey of the Magdalene, at Châteaudun, on the Christmas-eve of our tale, there stood, for a brief period, the figure of a young and noble-looking youth, watching, with eager interest, the preparations for the service of the midnight mass.

He had carefully placed himself in a position where no light from the torches of those busied about the chapel could be thrown on his face, nor did anyone remark him, when, after falling on his knees in a sort of irresolute agony for a

few seconds, he rushed out of the sacred building as if pursued.

Half an hour afterwards he was in company with the astrologer Gentili, and, laden with pickaxe and torch, was stumbling down the craggy entrance that led into the subterranean gulf; for the young man was Claude Genest.

The treasure-seekers did not waste many words upon each other at first. The road was rough and slippery, and there was that in each of their hearts towards the other which did not encourage friendly intercourse.

But at last Claude Genest, who was foremost, stopped short. "Here is wet at the bottom of the vault in some places, Gentili," observed he. "Is there a more equable temperature in these depths than in the outer air, so that the frost is less severe?"

Gentili went gloomily on, considerably puzzled for an answer. He suggested, however, that he had fancied the cold not quite so intense outside as it had been of late, but it was possible Mr. Genest's suggestion might be correct. The real truth was, that Signor Gentili's head

was too full of other matters for him to be troubling himself about the wet at the bottom of The Gulf!

The nearer he approached the decisive moment, when he must break loose from his dupe the more perplexed he became. The consciousness of guilt is no great strengthener of the nerves; and although he had felt tolerably satisfied when he had mentally measured his bodily strength with Claude's in his own little parlour, that confidence had failed more than once of late; and especially since Claude's obstinacy had displayed an unsuspected phase of character in him.

What, if this, in some respects, soft-headed youth, should, nevertheless, in a moment of emergency, and when roused up by a sense of having been wronged, turn upon him like an irritated lion on its prey?

Well, well! Gentili settled within himself, that when once the money was in his grasp, he must sneak, not fight himself, away.

On they proceeded for some time, and until Gentili saw in the distance, by a gleam of

moonlight which struck down into the vaults from above, that they were approaching the chasm which opened into The Gulf from the garden of the Franciscan friars.

“There!” exclaimed he, “down that opening, in compliance with your wishes, hangs the bell that is to warn us of the sacred moment proposed by your Bonneval legend! Great is your faith, young man, and great was the pay demanded by the young rascal whom I have hired to warn us of the appointed hour. That, however,” added he, somewhat surlily, “I must leave to you to settle!”

Claude Genest laughed that strange unaccountable laugh of his, at this announcement from Gentili, adding, that he would pay him twice over if he proved true to his office, and rang the bell that hung suspended from the chasm into the vaults, as long as the mysterious period of discovery lasted.

Another silence followed, till Claude, annoyed by stumbling in the wet, proposed that they should climb on some of those ledges of rock, which, on one side of The Gulf, formed a

series of two or three pathways of different heights—the other side being a precipitous cliff.

Gentili made no opposition, but followed as before, while Claude clambered up to the highest ledge, which scarcely admitted room for his standing upright; descending, therefore, to the one immediately below, he skirted along it for a time, and till they were nearly opposite the chasm before described. Here the subterranean vault branched off for a considerable distance, sideways, so that there was a choice of roads for the treasure-seekers. Either they could turn along the side branch, or pursue their way onwards, beyond the chasm, towards the further extremity of the cavern.

“Now, Gentili, for your skill!” exclaimed Claude, turning round to his companion. “Is it onwards, or sideways, we must go? Surely, by this time, you must have some notion of the spot!”

Gentili had difficulty in not betraying his embarrassment, and would almost have sacrificed the money in prospect, to be out of this detestable and perplexing mess. Rallying him-

self, and assuming, as well as he could, his dictatorial manner, however, he stretched out his arm towards the side branch of the vault, and shouted, "Yonder, yonder, yonder!" as if a sudden inspiration had seized him. Then, pressing forward, he took the lead himself, and hurried on. As they proceeded they could perceive, by holding their torches aloft, that the deep side-vault was terminated by a circular wall of rocks, broken into a thousand fantastic shapes. On reaching this, Gentili selected a small platform for a sort of resting-place, and showed signs of commencing his necromantic operations, for which, in case of need, he had taken care to provide himself with ample means.

Drawing from his breast the parchment on which was elaborated a horary question respecting the discovery of the treasure, and producing a compass from his pocket, he informed Claude that, the ascending sign being Taurus, it was absolutely essential that their search should be south and by east, which was, as he pointed out, the direction in which they now stood.

He had a volume to refer to, in corroboration of this assertion, and took infinite trouble to place the whole matter before Claude, that he might be satisfied of the rules under which they were working; and Claude, who was becoming a little distracted between his confidence in the dicta of the legend, and the science of Gentili, examined the astrological figure and the references with the most interested attention, as if resolved to arrive at the truth.

All was clearly as Gentili said; and *this*, therefore, and no other, was the direction in which they must search.

“Now then,” pursued the astrologer, (who was beginning to wonder when the bell would ring, and what he must do when it did,) “observe here, my son:—Jupiter in the fourth house, and in trine aspect to the sun:—a sign, beyond contradiction, that the treasure found will be in part, at least, gold. Here also, in this other place, you may notice the planet Mercury himself, whose sextile aspect with Jupiter betokens jewels also, and other rich effects.”

A great deal more such stuff as this he dealt out to Claude, proving also, in a manner which certainly did not admit of counter-proof, that *this* was the spot, and that the hour was close at hand when the secret would be made known, and the vast hoards of wealth secreted by Robert de Blois placed in the hands of his fortunate descendant.

Muttering some unintelligible words, he now drew figures on the rock with his divining rod; and then, taking up the pickaxe, struck several heavy blows on the stone, ordering Claude to do the same.

Of this, however, and of the noise which ensued, echoed as it was around, Claude grew weary, and spared his blows, that he might the more readily catch the first sounds of the bell, on which, every now and then, he felt more inclined to depend than on Gentili's necromantic powers.

Gentili, meanwhile, excited and uneasy, plunged into the cant of his trade, and shouted out certain incantations of spirits, which he knew by rote, as confidently as if he believed

that "Bokim," or some other of the evil ones, whom he invoked, could, in reality, come to his assistance; and, observing the agitation into which these cries threw Claude, he mentally determined to pursue that line yet further; involve his victim in a confusion of terror, and take advantage of it to obtain his money, and then escape from the place.

The idea was an admirable one; and, as the rascally old astrologer had brought with him gums, incense, and other ingredients for fumigation, he now described with them a sort of magic circle around Claude, and setting fire to them, recommenced his outcries for spiritual assistance, striking the rocks, from time to time, to increase the uproar.

Claude, half stifled by the fumes, stood in the midst of the circle as if paralyzed; following Gentili's gestures with his eyes, and listening to his incantations, till he trembled from head to foot.

Watching this moment with eyes of greedy delight, Gentili burst through the circle, and seized Claude violently by the arm.

“By the mysteries of the deep!” he shouted; “by the flames of Banal! by the power of the east, and the silence of the night! by the holy rites of Hecate!—yonder, yonder, yonder, is the treasure!”

As he spoke he touched a mass of rock with the divining-rod.

“And now,” added he, “for the sacrifice! The coin, the base coin—in exchange for the fortune of a king!”

He waved his rod over Claude’s head, who was fast becoming giddy; and who now mechanically emptied his pockets of that large sum of money which he had obtained from his mother’s property. The astrologer seized it, but with perhaps almost too great a show of avidity; for while looking stealthily round, as if to take advantage of the next moment for flight, he found himself, very unexpectedly, in the grasp of Claude.

“Take up your pickaxe!” exclaimed the young man, with a sudden, sober determination of manner which startled his companion.

“Take up your pickaxe, and lay the first

stroke on the magical spot yourself; you said a very slight effort would remove the stone that hid the entrance."

"There is a spirit in the way," muttered Gentili, between his teeth, "whom your stepping from the circle has disturbed!"

"Exorcise him back to hell, then!" exclaimed Claude, indignantly; "you have my money, Gentili, and more than ever was mine! Strike the first blow for the recovery of my fortunes, or I will send you after those you have invoked!"

Gentili, execrating Claude's strength of grasp, and still more his outbreak of passion, to the bottom of his heart, took up the pickaxe as desired, and struck a heavy blow on the rock; while Claude stood by, with his own pickaxe raised aloft in the air; and, had it not been for this, there is no saying in what direction the astrologer might not have struck the second time. Time and opportunity make other villains besides thieves, and on this occasion it was possible that Gentili might, in his despair, have added murder to a long catalogue of crimes.

But the treasure-seekers were here suddenly interrupted ; for all at once a sound, loud and appalling as the prolonged roar of artillery, or the crash of thunder when it breaks over the traveller's head as if the heavens above him had opened, was heard through The Gulf.

"The fiends have answered you!" cried Claude at once; "the Lord deliver me from them, and you, and from this hour of horror!"

With these words he sank on his knees, and wrung his hands in despair.

"Impotent fool!" shouted the astrologer, as he caught up his torch, and rushed along the side-vault, under some faint suspicion of the terrible truth, which burst upon him when he reached the corner whence they had turned aside.

All along the hollow bottom of The Gulf which they had traversed so securely before, there poured now a torrent of water, which no human power could contend against, and which, swelling, as if by magic, in its course, threatened soon to deluge every inch of the cavern in which they were thus miserably caught. A

sudden thaw had taken place, and the river had come down in irresistible floods !

Gentili's outcry, when he first took in the full sense of the danger, and saw that escape was impossible, was an absolute shriek of agony ; and it was answered by an exclamation of despair from Claude, who had followed him and just reached his side. " Merciful heaven ! the river ! we are lost !" cried he.

Gentili turned at the sound, and, throwing his torch on the upper ledge, seized on Claude by the neck, and, in the madness of his half-delirious wrath, strove to hurl him to the ground.

" Fool ! unutterable fool ! dupe ! dog ! this is your doing !" he muttered, as, half breathless, he struggled with the young man, who, powerful from his youth, was, however, more than a match for him.

He had had the advantage, it is true, in the onset, by the suddenness of his attack ; but Claude, who seemed just now to be awaking out of the dream of a lifetime, succeeded at last in extricating his throat from Gentili's clutch, and then the day was his own.

With his hand again upon the astrologer's arm, he held him tightly pressed against the rock, and pointed with the torch in the other, to the rapidly increasing waters.

"We are doomed, old man," cried he, in tones which had acquired depth and intensity from their despair; "we are doomed! what is there left to fight about? if I am dupe and fool, what are you but villain and deceiver? We are like the thieves in the Gospel. We are suffering justly and for our sins. Shout Amen to the confession, liar and cheat as you are, before you die!"

Gentili struggled and gnashed his teeth, glaring at Claude with an eye that was ferocious in its hate. Even in the extremity of his own danger, Claude was appalled by this revelation of the character of the man in whom he had trusted.

He let go his arm; but as soon as it was free, Gentili thrust it into his bosom, and, when he drew it out again, Claude saw the glare of his torch fall on the steel of a dagger.

Instantaneously the young man had backed

a couple of paces, and levelled a pistol at the astrologer's head.

Gentili gave a yell of disappointed rage, and flung his dagger into the torrent.

"Climb to the upper ledge, old man," said Claude, with unnatural calmness, when he observed that the waters were washing over their feet. "It is justly and for our sins that we are suffering here! Justly and for our sins!" he kept murmuring as the astrologer obeyed his suggestion, and he himself followed after.

"Will you not pray, Gentili?" continued Claude. "Will you die like a beast?"

The astrologer, as he sat crouched on the ledge opposite Claude, who still kept the pistol in his hand, answered by a volley of imprecations, which made the young man's blood run cold in his veins.

Accusing Claude of being the cause of their horrible end, by his immeasurable folly in crediting any man's pretensions to supernatural power, and avowing unscrupulously his own motive for the deceptions he had practised, the astrologer flung all the responsibility and blame

in Claude's teeth, and loaded him with curses and abuse.

In an agony of heart, which arose far more from the retrospect of a misguided life, terminating in such a manner, in such a pursuit, at such a moment, and with such a man, than from any cowardly fear of death, Claude Genest, shutting his ears as well as he could to the blasphemies and reproaches of his companion, strove to pray for them both.

At this moment the ringing of the bell, which hung suspended down the chasm, and which was to have been the signal for the commencement of the treasure-seeking, was heard distinctly through the tumult of the rushing water; and immediately afterwards a voice was distinguished, distant as it was.

"Claude Genest, pray and hope! Claude Genest, pray and hope!" was repeated again and again.

"There is life yonder," shouted the astrologer; and, wild to be the first to take advantage of what seemed some proffered means of escape, he sprang from the ledge into the

water, before the no less startled Claude had time to observe or prevent his intention.

He hoped (although no swimmer) to get across the stream, and reach the bell, which was suspended by a rope; under some indefinite idea of being drawn up by the speaker above. And, for the narrow space across the bed of the vault, he did indeed contrive to keep himself afloat, and, by gaining a momentary footing on the broken rock-work on the opposite side of The Gulf, he was enabled to make one spring at the bell.

But the rope to which it was attached being very slightly secured above, gave way at once with his heavy weight, and rope, bell, and astrologer fell back into the torrent together !

Such was the miserable end of Signor Gentili; for whether it was that his body was kept down by the heavy bags of silver, in which Claude's payment to him had been made, or that he got entangled with bell-rope and bell, certain it is that from that gloomy cavern-bed he rose no more.

Claude, meanwhile, had called after his

wretched companion, in horror at his mad attempt. He stretched the necromantic pole after him into the darkness, promising him every help he could give, but in vain. And when no answer was returned, and no sound came to his ear, but the continued flow of the river, the young man ceased from further efforts; and, sitting down once more on the upper ledge of rock, in a spot which faced towards the entrance of The Gulf, he strove to prepare himself for that death which seemed to be inevitable, in spite of the words which had followed the ringing of the bell.

Of them more than one solution offered itself to his thoughts. They had indeed, perhaps, indicated help, of which the astrologer had by this time availed himself; but the heart of Claude Genest had ceased to rebel, and he murmured to himself the bitter reflection, that such a man as Gentili was even less prepared for death than himself.

But, might not those words have been a supernatural announcement, permitted in mercy, to throw a gleam of comfort round the dying

in the parting hour? Ay! perhaps even for him, who had, in this eleventh hour of a wasted life, tried to pray, there might be hope in the boundless mercy of the Most High!

Or perhaps,—alas and alas!—those sounds might have been but the hallucination of an over-excited brain! Either from the unnatural compression of the air, owing to the sudden access of water into those pent-up vaults, or from mere mental emotion, Claude began to feel that everything around him, and all that was happening, was taking the sensation of a dream.

The past and present, too, seemed to be blending into each other, in a strange and incomprehensible manner. His weeping, remonstrating mother at Bonneval was as vividly before him now, as the astrologer had been on the ledge of rock but a few minutes ago. Adrian's expostulations were sounding in his ears, mingled with the death-boding rush of the water; and Mathilde's gentle counsels, earnest love, and sweet unforgotten smile, returned upon him, with all the freshness of present

reality, though bitterly mixed with a sense of having done wrong to her and all—ay, all !

A squandered lifetime ; a love which he had thrown cruelly back on itself, though he had never ceased to prize it : a mother insulted and driven to poverty : a brother vilified and exiled from home : oh ! what could be the stake for which he had thrown away so much possible happiness, and done so much actual evil ?

—Verily, the honour, and glory, and comfort, and joy of a life of vain pretence !—

“ Justly and for our sins ! ” were the words that, from time to time, broke from the wretched Claude, as these visions of his past life pressed more and more on his brain, while the waters swelled higher and higher. Even the uppermost ledge could not protect him much longer, and there was no outlet, no hope ; for against the heavy torrent that set along the vault no unpractised limbs could struggle.

With a last heart-wrung ejaculation for mercy, he covered up his face with his hands, and bent it down on his knees.

At that instant a bell from the chasm sounded.

again, and the voice said: "Claude Genest, hope and pray!"

Claude started up, but only to sink down again the next moment. "I am mad!" was his terrible cry; yet he stared before him with all the energy of a rational man.

For in the distance, towards the entrance of the vault, a bright light seemed suddenly to be spreading over water and rock. Oh, those maddening visions! Claude pressed his hand to his brow, as if to dispel them by an effort of mind; but in vain!

In the midst of the light which appeared to illuminate the scene, as if with the blaze of torches, a boat seemed swiftly approaching through the cavern. Nearer, rapidly nearer, borne on by the torrent, it came. Now one crag, now another, as it dashed along, caught the gleam of the lights it carried; and in it human forms could be distinguished; and, among those human forms—oh, misery! what *could* it be but a vision?—there appeared those dear ones who had haunted the last remorseful reflections of Claude Genest!



THE GULF.



He gazed, till sight seemed deserting his eyes, and hearing to forsake him.

“ My brother ! Mathilde ! ” he strove to articulate, but his tongue refused its office.

He stretched out his languid arms to the vision, and—mockery beyond all other !—Mathilde herself seemed to rise in the boat, and stretch out her own to him in answer.

“ She is dead, and has come to take me to mercy ! ” was Claude’s last conscious thought.

The perils of the night could not be considered as really over until the adventurous little boat-party, who had so happily succeeded in rescuing the insensible Claude, had made the ascent of the chasm in safety, by means of a small litter, let down by ropes, the management of which was entrusted to the Benedictine monk, and the friendly assistance he might obtain from the Franciscan friars.

It was a well-devised plan, however—thanks to Zamet’s ingenuity ; and being well-conducted

by Father Ulric, and well-supported by his friends in the monastery, it proved successful.

Yet the party below, who knew that their very lives depended on the care and skill of those in the garden, might well be excused in feeling some little anxiety, when, after having drifted down the stream to the chasm, they reached the spot destined for the experiment.

Zamet insisted on being the first to test the safety of the contrivance, and prepared himself to do so, while the notary steadied the boat against the current (the violence of which was subsiding), by using his oar as a pole, and Adrian watched for a favouring projection of rock, which he might lay hold of, thereby to retain the boat in its proper position.

Meanwhile, Claude lay on the clothing provided by Mathilde's care, totally unconscious of all that was passing, even though Mathilde was trying to chafe his cold hands into warmth between her own, and although many a tear fell from her eyes upon his pallid face.

He had been found still sitting on the rock, when the boat reached the spot; still straining

his eyes after the supposed vision ; but he had neither spoken nor moved since.

Mathilde was satisfied, however, when, after he had been lifted down to her by the notary and Adrian, she observed his weary eyes close. She trusted to time, and the strength of youth, to restore him further.

For the astrologer they had called in vain, and had finally given him up in despair.

A few hailing shouts to those above were quickly answered with hearty delight ; the litter was carefully let down, and in a few minutes more Zamet was ascending, slowly but securely, through the air.

The experiment having been successful, no further fears were entertained ; and Claude and Mathilde were in succession received to the welcome greetings of their friends in the garden.

While their transit was accomplishing, the notary, who was still paddling against the stream with his oar, suddenly struck against something, which gave way under his touch.

“ Adrian Genest ! ” cried he, hastily, “ change places, and strike here ! ”

Adrian complied ; and he, too, struck against a substance below.

“ The astrologer’s body ! ” was his involuntary exclamation ; and he at once proceeded, by dint of repeated efforts, to haul up from the bed of the vault, what proved, indeed, to be the dead body of Gentili.

Laden with money, entangled with bell-rope and bell, there had been no chance for the wretched man when he once went down, and he had perished without a word or a struggle.

“ Christian burial ! ” observed the notary, with the utmost composure, as he arranged the corpse for the litter. “ It is permitted to man to punish in this world, but never to judge for the next, Mr. Genest. Do you agree with me ? ”

“ To the uttermost,” answered Adrian, who had not beheld, unmoved, the inanimate form of the man who had perished in an adventure in which his brother was equally implicated. “ If our guilt is measured by our opportunities, (and what else *can* measure it ?) many of the first in their own estimation will be last hereafter.”

“ Ay, ay ! ” continued the notary, warmly.

“ If the mighty works which have been done in some cases, had been done here also—who knows but what this man might have repented, long ago, in sackcloth and ashes ? However, it befits us best to deal only with generals, Mr. Genest ! Such men as these have learning, which is a double curse to them. Here lies one strangled, as it were, with ill-gotten gold. Your brother’s silver has been the ruin of his body—of his soul let us say nothing. Cover him up, Adrian ; the litter is descending.”

“ Judge leniently of those who have not been guided aright in their youth, M. de Tessier !” cried Adrian, as the notary was lifting the corpse upon the litter, and preparing to accompany it himself ; for Adrian had insisted on being the last to leave the spot which had so nearly proved the grave of his brother.

“ Who has greater reason to do so than I have ?” cried the notary, as the litter began to ascend ; and he added, while yet within hearing, “ Mr. Genest, I know what you mean, and feel as you would wish !”

Adrian was, indeed, endeavouring to claim,

at the hands of Mathilde's father, a merciful consideration for the errors of his brother.

Awkward as it was for the last of the party to spring into the litter unassisted, Adrian's agility easily surmounted the difficulty, and the whole party were soon housed under the roof of the Franciscan monastery. Nor let the reader be startled at this fact, for it does not stand alone.

There was once a noble English gentlewoman who left her home, during the Peninsular war, to join her husband, whom she had heard of as ill and wounded in Spain. She underwent several perilous adventures, and saw some strange sights. On one occasion she crept under the legs of her husband's horse while the regiment was crossing a bridge of boats, in order to escape observation, for the women had been forbidden to pass; and it is said that the great Duke turned as blind an eye as Lord Nelson's, to the romantic and daring action. At another time she watched a battle from an eminence, and saw, or thought she saw, her husband's grey horse struggling in the fight.

But there was one particular occasion, on which this dauntless lady arrived at night at the gates of a Spanish monastery, with her husband and cousin, both wounded, and borne along by two or three soldiers.

They knocked for admittance and help, which were readily granted to the men; but when the old friars saw, by the flare of their lights, that there was a lady of the party, they protested against her entrance. She made known her relationship, but in vain. Routine was inexorable. No woman could be admitted within those gates. "Madam, the laws of our order forbid it!" cried they.

"Gentlemen, the laws of war allow it!" was her answer, as with consummate dignity, yet womanly gentleness, she stepped over the threshold, and entered the forbidden abode.

Not another objection was made; the deed had been done, and cordiality never went beyond that which the English officer and his wife met with in the monastery of Spanish friars.

It was under some such pressure as this—

that is, the perilous exigency of the case—that the Franciscan monks were induced to include Mathilde among the chilled and drenched night-wanderers whom they now received under their roof; and their medical skill was of no small service to Claude, whose whole system had received a violent shock, the result of which could not at first be determined. Mathilde herself was compelled to retire, and submit to a wisely chosen treatment; while the Benedictine monk and Adrian watched, in turns, by the sick man's bed.

Father Ulric was with his patient alone, when the first symptoms of a return to consciousness appeared, and him he recognized immediately; after a time connecting him, although at first in a confused way, with the adventures of the night, and making a thousand feverish inquiries as to what had happened. A medicine administered by the monk soothed by degrees his excited state, and, after another hour or two's rest, the clouds cleared away from his brain; to be succeeded only, however, by the most bitter feelings of self-reproach and remorse.

But the remorse led to repentance, and he now, for the first time for many a long year, opened his whole heart in genuine uncompromising confession; and afterwards heard from the Benedictine monk the true history of his almost miraculous rescue.

It is easy, comparatively, no doubt, to repent on a bed of illness; but it is not every one who does it even there. Claude Genest, however, did. Everything had conspired to impress him; and under such very remarkable circumstances as those by which he had been surrounded, during the previous four-and-twenty hours, it was almost impossible that he should not receive a lesson for life.

Of Mathilde he did not definitely speak; but Father Ulric discovered that he was aware of her presence in the boat with his brother; and by and bye he requested to see them all.

It was a strange meeting. Claude was too much overwhelmed to speak; but when Adrian and Mathilde approached his bed, he took a hand of each of theirs between his own, and, grasping them fervently together, bent his lips

over them, as if in the act of invoking some particular blessing. Mathilde involuntarily drew back, and in the next instant the brothers were in each other's arms.

And Claude, hanging on the neck of the injured Adrian, who wept over him tears of the most devoted affection, was conscious of no emotions but those of the deepest contrition and love; no, not even although he believed, at that moment, that his brother had become possessed of the only treasure in the world whose value he had never mistaken, though practically he had rejected it—Mathilde's love! Claude Genest's repentance was certainly sincere!

Hours passed on in which repose was again enjoined, and in which the young man neither spoke nor moved: but, during that period, many a mental struggle took place, of which record is only taken there, where the secrets of all hearts are registered.

Mathilde and Adrian! was it not his duty to rejoice in their happiness? How better could he make amends for his life of cruel self-worship! His mother, too! was there not an

obvious obligation there, for had he not to compensate for the wanton ingratitude of the past?

"Bitter," says the great Italian poet, "is the ascent and descent of another man's stairs." Bitterer still the steps by which we retrace the pathways of sin!

Evil suggestions represented to the troubled youth the weary insipidity of such a life as repentance must carry him back to at Bonneval. There would be the talk of neighbours; the contempt of nominal friends at Châteaudun; the painful sinking in position, pretension, appearance, everything!

Had Claude Genest lent a favourable ear to such considerations, all the controlling events of the past night would have worked together for him in vain. But he had passed through the valley of the shadow of death; and it was wonderful by what a different standard he now measured the value of the so-called pains and pleasures of life.

"Father Ulric!" said he at last, when the shades of another evening had darkened the chamber.

"I am here," answered the Benedictine monk, approaching the pallet of Claude, and sitting down by him.

"Tell them, as soon as you can, Father," said Claude, "that they need not be troubled about what I shall do hereafter, if I live. I have but one wish. To return to Bonneval, and work to repair the evil I have done. Leave me the hope that I may, even yet, live to make my mother's old age happy. For the rest, remember, that, as nothing now is mine, I must, for the present at any rate, work as a servant, rather than as a partner."

He paused to take breath, and Father Ulric whispered words of comfort and approval, which—oh, wonderful change!—were accepted by Claude with gratitude, instead of the contemptuous ridicule he would have felt so short a time ago. Ere long he spoke again—

"Father, are Adrian and Mathilde yet married?"

"My son!" exclaimed the Benedictine monk, almost starting with surprise. But he controlled himself instantly, and answered calmly

to Claude's repetition of the question:—"They are not."

"Let me confess to you," pursued Claude, in a low voice, and stretching out his arm till his hand touched that of the monk, "I have had but one real struggle since I was laid repenting on this bed, and even *that* is over now, and I am at peace. Stoop down to me, and listen." Father Ulric bent down, and Claude proceeded:

"The giving up a life of folly and insincerity is nothing; the return to the position I so wrongly despised is nothing; the prospect of labour and self-denial is nothing; the contempt and ridicule of the world is nothing: but there was one thing which I had prized at its right value all through my vain career, and even when I affected to despise it.—Mathilde's love! Father! I own it too late, but it was woven into my heart's core!"

Here Claude turned his head away from the monk, and was silent for several seconds, but presently he resumed in a low voice:—

"I guessed their love first when I saw them together in the boat, and knew it was true when

they came to me here. Most righteously have I forfeited what I threw away as valueless when possessed ! Righteous, too, is the judgment which has given her to one so worthy of her. And, Father ! hold me up that you may see I am in earnest ! Father, I never loved my brother so fondly in my life as when I embraced him, believing him to be Mathilde's husband. See how I am striving to test my own sincerity, and—and—lay me down again ! Pray for me, that my strength fail not."

Father Ulric laid his patient down ; but he did not undeceive him.

Many days, nay weeks, elapsed before it was considered safe to remove Claude Genest to his home ; and during that time the notary, and Mathilde, and even Adrian, returned to Bonneval ; for the Benedictine monk insisted on being the one to nurse the rescued young man through the feverish illness which followed the night of excitement and terror.

Much could be effected, for soul as well as body, he thought, in the days of languid recovery, and he was anxious, moreover, to gain

a little further insight into the character of one for whose fate he had become deeply interested.

Happily, there appeared to be no backsliding in Claude's good intentions, at any rate; and that was all that could be judged of for the present.

Gradually as he recovered, too, he became more and more impatient to get back to his family and home; where Adrian, having restored the rescued money to the firm, and explained Claude's intentions to his mother, had paved the way for a happy welcome and return.

"My son," said Father Ulric, when at last the day and hour had come when he and Claude had approached on foot within sight of Bonneval, "I have something yet to reveal to you."

Claude, whose thoughts had, at sight of the place, gone back with painful self-reproach to the recollection of his last evil journey there, turned round with a saddened aspect to his friend.

"You are troubled, Claude Genest!" cried the monk, startled by a sudden apprehension.

“ For the *past* ; not for the *present*, Father,” exclaimed Claude, earnestly. “ My heart is with them all already.”

“ Yet stay,” continued the reassured monk ; “ I have purposely concealed something from you : not undeceived you, that is to say, upon a point very near your heart. Claude Genest ! I wished you to struggle manfully through the hardest trial of life. Self-abnegation, and the resignation of what is *justly* dear. The lesson is over now, and I trust has been learnt for ever.”

“ You speak in riddles,” was Claude’s answer, as a half smile broke over his face. And, in truth, with his own heart, full to overflowing, he could not follow the train of thought indicated by the good old monk.

Father Ulric smiled in return. “ Well, then, hear it in plain words. You are expecting to meet to-night your brother Adrian and Mathilde de Tessier. Do not be deceived about them. They have never loved each other as you supposed.”

Claude stood motionless, and gasped for breath.

"And they are not—" stammered he.

"Married? No, nor ever will be," replied the monk.

A flash of joy passed for a moment over Claude's face; but in the next, clouds of wretchedness seemed to gather over it.

"Let me go back to Châteaudun," he exclaimed in a voice of unutterable distress; "the sins of my life lie heavy on me; but to see Mathilde unfettered, and forbear to love her, is, I think, more than I am able to go through."

Father Ulric made no answer; and after a few seconds Claude had recovered his composure.

"I have spoken nonsense and folly," he murmured, in a subdued voice. "We can bear anything we are called upon to bear,—by submission! Let us go on, Father."

And on they went.

That last trial was, however, spared to Claude Genest. He had to work his way by patient labour, it is true, to an honourable reputation and respectable position; and, in doing so, he had to brave the ridicule of some, and the evil

tongues of others, and, what was more difficult still, to resist the pleadings of an indolence which habit had made but too agreeable. But through all these struggles he had never to bewail any change of feeling in Mathilde de Tessier.

Adrian returned at once to Blois, where his prospects were too bright to be resigned; and, by so doing, he forced the control of the family property into the hands of Claude, whose vigilant management and earnest efforts, kept alive as they were by a desire to repair the injuries his folly had inflicted, availed, at last, to restore prosperity to the house of Genest.

And one day (I will not say how long afterwards) Adrian Genest came back, as a welcome visitor to his mother's house, to be present at the marriage of Claude with Mathilde; a long deferred, but at last permitted event.

He was sitting in his room in the evening, in company with his old friend, and foster-brother, Zamet Salviati; and, as might be expected, they were holding occasional discourse together.

"Monseigneur!" observed Zamet, at last, "I

have been remarkably successful with your hair this evening."

"So much the better," replied Adrian. "It is an important occasion, remember; and, although my own lady-love is far away in the noble town of Blois, I shall be glad not to appear at this great family event in the character of the ugly twin."

"Monsieur has too good a heart to be ugly," remarked Zamet, with a smile.

"Flattery, Zamet, from one foster-brother to another? This is wasted trouble, indeed!"

"Monsieur will learn, some day, that what he calls flattery is, in reality, the truest philosophy," returned Zamet. "There is always a soul beyond the features, and this is a thousand times more expressive than they are. Ah, Mr. Adrian, there was no handsomeness about your brother while his heart was clouded over by folly, and that miserable Gentili was leading him to evil! But look, Monsieur;—this evening reminds me of the one on which I dressed Mr. Claude's hair at Châteaudun:—and what I want to know is, did it never strike you that, after all,

the legend of our native town was fully accomplished on that Christmas-eve?"

"Never! how could it?" exclaimed Adrian, really at a loss to imagine what Zamet could possibly mean.

"Nevertheless, Monsieur, it is true. Your brother found a treasure that night in the vaults of Châteaudun, during the reading of the midnight mass."

"Surely not," answered Adrian, somewhat abstractedly. "The astrologer found the treasure, perhaps—if ill-gotten wealth is a treasure—and lost his life for his pains. But my brother—no!"

"Not the treasure he was looking for, I quite admit, Monsieur. We are all of us apt to search for the wrong thing now and then; but sometimes, when we are looking for rubbish, a real treasure is sent to us, whether we deserve it or not."

"True enough, Zamet. You are philosophizing now, at any rate, I see. But although you and I may consider an altered mind a treasure to one who has been misled, it will not

serve as an example of a fulfilled legend, I fear."

"Monsieur has not caught my meaning, even yet!" exclaimed Zamet. "Mr. Claude found a real, actual treasure in the vaults of Châteaudun that night."

"Why, what?" asked the puzzled Adrian.

"*Mademoiselle Mathilde!*" answered Zamet, with his most impressive bow.

THE END.

